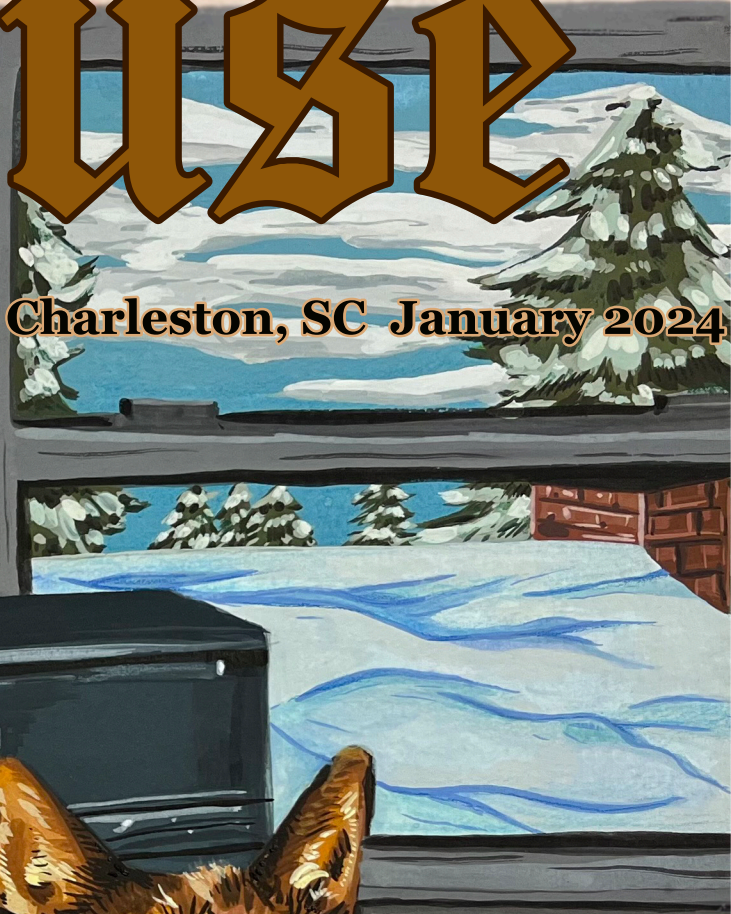


# Applause

Volume 25, Number 5 School of the Arts, North Charleston, SC January 2024



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YEAR SOA





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From the Editors

Dear Readers,

Welcome to our January issue! Somehow it's 2024, but it feels as if we (your editors) were seventh graders only yesterday. January is the time of new beginnings, new goals, and new resolutions, and it feels odd to be entering this time of growth when time seems so stagnant. Nevertheless, toss your worries of time passing, the new semester, and existential dread aside, because you've finally picked up the most recent issue of Applause, and all's right with the world.

In this issue, we tied 2023 up in a pink coquette bow, recapping the year's hits, SOA's Holiday Spectacular, and Synergy Kombucha's best flavors. Wondering what's in and what's out for 2024? Check out page 5 for staff writer Emma Shelton's beautifully written editorial on individuality this year.

While SOA is known for its talent and dedication to the fine arts, our high school boys are no strangers to the volleyball court. Although the class of 2025 took a beating from the freshmen, your Junior editors-in-chief made the gracious decision to feature it anyway, so check out the centerfold on page 14.

With Love, from the Best Editors-In-Chief Ever,

Riley Borkowski and Cate Traywick

Riley Borkowski Cate Traywick



Applause

since 1999, the official student publication of School of the Arts
Founded in 1995 by Rose Maree Myers

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Cover Art by Lucy Cromwell

SOA Calendar

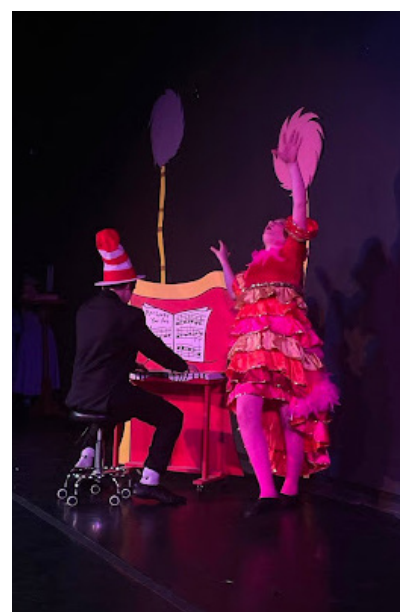
by Ashley Peterson

- Jan 17: 6th grade Theater, BBT. 4pm and 6:30pm
Jan 17: Strings Senior Thesis, RMMT, 6pm
Jan 18: 6th grade Theater, BBT, 4pm and 6:30pm
Jan 23: End of second quarter/first semester
Jan 24: Teacher work day
Jan 26: Early Release
Jan 29 & 30: Band Senior Thesis, RMMT, 6:30pm

- Jan 31: Dancing With the Teachers, RMMT, 6:30pm
Feb 8, 9, 10: Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, RMMT, 6:30pm
Feb 11: Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, RMMT, 2pm
Feb 12 & 13: 10/11/12 grade Theater: Hourglass Tales 5.0, BBT, 4pm and 6:30pm
Feb 13: Piano Senior Thesis, RMMT, 5:30pm
Feb 16: Early Release
Feb 16: 6th grade dance, Cafe
Feb 19: Presidents day (no school)
Feb 20: Band Pre-CPA Concert, RMMT, 6:30pm



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by Elle Baker

Junior Theater Major Directs Youth Production of Seussical
by Isis Hanna

SOA Students "Paint the Town Red and Gold" at the Pour House
by Isabella Pineda



## Sass Attack: The Quarter 2 Slogfest

by Jovanny Silva Velasquez

“Sass Attack” was started in 2007 by Applause writer **David Sass** and continued for seventeen years. Our senior Piano major, **Jovanny Silva Velasquez**, has continued the tradition.

Throughout my wealthy yet tumultuous high school career, there has been a never ending phenomenon that I’ve had to endure through time and time again. This year is no different, as I find myself once more attempting to ignore my 6 AM alarm and struggling to pick up a pencil to even write my name.

Such a phenomenon is one that I like to call the “Quarter 2 Slog”, an effect of which I’m confident has permeated throughout each one of you. Characterized by drastic procrastination, general inability to rise from your bed, and an increased desire to become a truant, the slog season seems to have hit even harder as we enter the second half.

As to why it hits the hardest in the second half of quarter 2 is a bit of a mystery... Could it be caused by the artificially extended length due to the breaks? Perhaps because it marks the halfway point of the year? No, not at all. What I firmly believe to be the root evil of quarter two slog comes from none other than the hivemind of SOA teachers.

To clarify, this is in no way shape or form an attack on all SOA teachers, it’s only an attack on some. For whatever reason, it seems as if Quarter 2 flips a switch in a teacher’s mind in order to make them hand out even more work, despite the dreaded deadlines that many of them seem to spit out. Why remind us constantly that the end of the quarter is coming “faster than we think” and then continue to hand us tests.

Overall, the slog is a peril that eventually consumes most high schoolers at SOA. While the times only get longer, and the homework only gets harder, just remember one thing: you MIGHT make it.



Jovanny Silva Velasquez

## Opinion: Humanity’s Effect On Dog

### Aggression

by Ella Kay

The negative stigma surrounding certain dog breeds worldwide is nauseating, but the United Kingdom’s recent actions have left me speechless. In 1991 The UK issued the Breed Specific legislation as well as the Dangerous Dog Act in an attempt to control dog attacks. The effects of the legislation included the banning of 4 dog breeds, Pit bulls, Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino, and the Fila Brasileiro. The act illegalizes breeding, advertising, gifting, abandoning and most shocking rehoming of any affected breed. As an animal activist and lover, I find these bans disgusting. The bans conclude that the UK police forces have power to seize a dog of the selected breed if it is not registered. They can also charge the owner with fines as well as criminal offenses. The dog, if registered, must be neutered, as well as kept muzzled and leashed if brought into public for “safety reasons”. Condoning this behavior for safety is abuse, for short nose breeds (like XL bullies) it is unsafe to wear a muzzle due to breathing difficulty caused by unfortunate overbreeding.

What really shocks me is the breedism and discrimination against any “dangerous” looking dogs. I myself have been an owner of 3 pitbull mixes, so it upsets me to believe that people see these sweet dogs as dangerous. I cannot even put it into words how much dogs mean to me, and to see an entire country ban a whole breed due to a few attacks is unfair. I am a strong believer in being a product of your environment. Every dog has the potential to be aggressive, how they are raised and trained is what affects their behavior. It is unfortunate that the dog breeds affected by the ban are the ones being overbred in unsafe conditions. If they want to control the amount of dog attacks, a better solution would be to crack down on overbreeding and animal abuse.

Growing up in an abusive environment is what has led these dogs to be defensive and violent. I firmly believe any dangerous dog (of any breed) that has caused serious harm to a human has to be euthanized. It is unsafe for the public to have loose aggressive dogs, but that doesn’t mean the whole breed should be banned. The rise in dog attacks is purely due to the lack of training on the owner’s parts. When owning such a physically large and



Ella Kay

strong dog there is no room for error when it comes to training. Dogs are animals, and it is the owners responsibility to train them if they wish to keep them in their household.

The XL bully has significant amounts of inbreeding that have caused genetic and behavioral issues that have been passed on. Many breeders are aware of these issues and continue to overbreed. “Dangerous” looking dogs, like XL bullies and pitbulls, are used as status symbols in the media. Therefore, fueling a higher demand for them because of their muscular stature. Placing a ban on a breed as a whole only solves the surface issues, not the deep rooted causes of these attacks. If we don’t solve the underlying causes, the pattern of attacks will continue on with other breeds as they become more desired. Many breeders only breed the dogs based on size or color while ignoring the medical effects. Breeding exclusively for looks leads to health issues and painful joint problems, making dogs more nervous or aggressive when provoked due to their condition. Not only their genetics but the environment breeders provide causes aggression. The first 8 weeks of a puppy’s life are important, it shapes its personality for the rest of its life. Being mistreated or neglected during this period leads to stress and violence. The question is, should we blame the breed for its genetics or the breeder?

Breedism isn’t just happening in the UK, I can’t even take my dog to the local park without getting hateful looks. Last time I took my pitbull/staffy mix on a trail I had a woman pick up her dog and say “let’s just stay right here” as I was passing. My dog in no means was showing aggression, the most she was doing was wagging her tail. I have taken responsibility as an owner and trained her to stay by my side on walks and to not pull on the leash.

The discrimination purely on looks is disgusting, I have never had a sweeter dog than my pitbull. The reputation surrounding them is truly our fault. We need to start training, stop over breeding, and start educating to fix this issue. Spread awareness of breedism and look past the negative stigma.

## Editorial: Excessive Screen Time and Its Effects on the Young Generation’s Education

Most people born into the last two or three generations will groan if they hear the words “it’s because of that phone!” in regards to one of their problems, whether it be headaches, loss of sleep, or lack of attention span. However, as much as nobody likes



Ella Kay

to hear it, recent research has shown that excessive screen time and exposure to social media is having a real effect on us- and more importantly, on the growing generation of still-developing children that will be taking over the world when we’re all too old to move. Generation Alpha begins around the year 2010. The iPhone was invented and released in 2007. Gen Alpha will be the first generation to grow up never knowing a time void of electronic devices and social media. We are finally seeing the effects of a childhood flooded with Cocomelon and Instagram Reels, and they aren’t great. And, worst of all, our exhausted teachers are getting the brunt of it.

Researchers are already beginning to look into the effects of the pandemic on kids just starting school in the last couple of years, and increased screen time goes

hand-in-hand with quarantine. With nothing to do but sit, most parents (understandably) introduced their kids to iPads full of entertainment that kept their minds and their kids’ minds occupied and off the horrifying state of the world. However, an article from Education Weekly says that parents did not always decrease the time their kids spent glued to a screen after the quarantine was lifted. The article explained that when young children get used to that amount of screen time, it can lead to excessive weight gain and obesity down the line, as well as extreme decreases in attention span.

According to *The Independent*, four in five primary school teachers believe that kids’ attention spans are significantly shorter than they were pre-pandemic. One in five say they cannot spend more than ten minutes on any one activity if they want to keep the attention of the class. Ten minutes is not nearly enough to cover a significant amount of content, nor does that information bode well for the ability to retain said content for later testing. Having information available at the click of a button is an infinitely valuable resource for humanity, but it also makes us complacent. Children who grow up with search engines get used to instant gratification, which can render them unable to sit and learn for extended periods of time. Ask any teacher, even teachers of older students, and they will tell you they are seeing lack of motivation and attention in class. When kids are



not met with instant gratification, they lose the desire to learn. We have not had a lot of time to collect research on the full effects of the pandemic or of screen time on developing brains, but we can see it all around us. As a society we will have to find ways to not only regulate the exposure of kids to screen time and help them catch up after quarantine, but we will also have to change our ways of teaching to accommodate for these new issues in order to ensure all children are learning and, more importantly, are wanting to learn.

## Opinion: Individuality Is In For 2024

by Emma Shelton

A new year means new trends, and the biggest one in 2024 will be individuality. The most important asset anyone can have is a specifically curated sense of self. It seems like right now there are so many oddly defined aesthetics, niches, and styles due to a generational desire to label everything; quiet luxury, office siren, indie sleaze, and rockstar girlfriend, to name a few. We chase these labels like they will give us a purpose in life, but I think it's time to leave them in the past.

Individuality is not uniqueness; some people feel that in order to be interesting, they must be different. That is simply not the case; to be an individual is not to be different from others, but to embrace the qualities that make you different. There is no use in avoiding being "basic," which will only ever make you seem judgmental and self-absorbed. If you have niche interests because you looked for the most niche things to be interested in and only focus on those, you are not interesting. Your interests should be what you like, not what you think is underground. Stop following trends and stop avoiding them; both of those routes lead to the same conclusion: losing your own sense of self.

Aimlessly following trends is just as bad as ignoring them completely. To have a personality developed only from what you are told is cool is kind of sad. You need to participate in what you enjoy and act without thinking about what other people are doing. I hope that in the new year, we also develop a new outlook and stop trying so hard to be something we are not. We should focus on not being the best version of ourselves, but being the most honest versions of ourselves. Don't be a follower; don't be an outsider; do what you want with your life.



Provided

Emma Shelton

## Opinion: Breaking Down New Year's Resolutions in Favor of Life's Real Challenges

by Riley Borkowski

We all know the drill. As the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve, we feel invincible as we are armed with a list of resolutions that can turn our lives around. But let's be real for a second: nobody sticks to their so-called "grand plans." In the early days of January, gyms are packed to the brim, and kale smoothies paired with quinoa salads dominate the shopping carts in every grocery store only to be replaced by the siren call of pizza and midnight snacks before the month ends, and only the strongest people make it to March. It's like our resolutions got a one-way ticket to the back burner. It's not our fault! Life gets busy, work piles up, and suddenly that daily yoga routine becomes a distant memory. Those language lessons you were so excited about? Well, Duolingo notifications turned into just another thing to swipe away. Resolutions are kind of like that friend who promises to call but never does, and it's not that we don't want to change; it's just that change is hard, and rotting in bed is always there for us.

I think the worst part of it all is the pressure. The pressure to reinvent ourselves overnight, to be this perfect version of us that's probably only achievable in a parallel universe in which SOA teaches young witches and wizards and Dr. Cusatis is the professor of transfiguration. So here's my take: instead of setting ourselves up for the ultimate glow-up, we should just enjoy the messy journey of life and set reasonable goals for ourselves. Small, achievable goals that won't make us feel like failures come February. Who needs the added stress of unmet resolutions when life's already throwing countless curveballs at us? If that resolution doesn't stick, it's not the end of the world. And let's face it, New Year's resolutions are overrated anyway.



Provided

Riley Borkowski



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## Sustainability Tips: Stop Washing Your Clothes

by Emma Shelton

We all wash our clothes, but some would be surprised to know that a lot of us are not washing our clothes correctly. There are so many efforts we could be making to save water and energy while preventing microplastics from ruining our clothes and entering the water, from the amount we wear certain items and the detergent we use to how many times a week we wash our clothes.

Most of the clothes we wear are only worn for a couple of hours, so they do not need to be washed after every wear. If you know it's not dirty, why would you wash it? That only wastes water and damages the clothing. Rewearing clothes is one of the smallest efforts you can make to help the earth. Before you decide to wash an item, think about how long it was worn for, if it was worn in a particularly dirty area, if you sweat in it, or if it was worn with a coat. Along with reusing your clothing, washing larger loads saves so much water, so stock up on dirty laundry before washing your clothes. What really matters in the end—having all your clothes washed or future generations having water?

Most laundry detergents, especially the liquid and pod ones, are filled with microplastics. These microplastics can infest our water and cause large adverse effects on the human body. They can also infect our oceans and become a source of health issues for marine animals. When we wash our clothes with these detergents, we fill our waterways with toxins that can harm marine life, cause algal blooms, and harm our environment. While the best thing you can do is find a laundry detergent that has no phosphates or microplastics, simply using less laundry detergent per load is also a helpful way to protect the environment. Most people use way too much laundry soap, as the guides on how much to use typically recommend using too much to get people to buy more.

There are so many small steps we can take to help save the earth, wash less, wear more, and stop using soap that is pumping our water with harmful chemicals.



University of Arizona

## Aquarium Aglow: A New Winter Tradition

by Lucy Cromwell

The South Carolina Aquarium has been holding a special after-hours light showcase for the past couple years, featuring festive decorations and the usual cast of creatures. Open from mid-November to New Years Eve, Aglow ran nightly till nine, since the normal operating hours of the Aquarium see it closing around five. The event is fit for all ages, since all the regular displays and tanks are open to the public, with a festive twist. Outside, the wharf is covered in lights, and neon signs of sea critters illuminate the walls along the main entrance. Once inside, it begins with the Sea Turtle Care center and its residents, injured sea turtles rescued from up and down the East Coast. Funnily, all the turtles have very cute cheesy names, like “Burrata” and “Asiago.”



Scuba Santa

Next, take the elevator up to the second floor, which has a beautiful view of the main hall decorated with giant ornaments and garlands. You'll be greeted by Liberty the bald eagle, if you haven't already heard her caws from downstairs. Liberty marks the entrance to the mountain section, since the Aquarium is organized by regions of South Carolina. In the mountains, trout and otters are illuminated by blinking lights, almost like falling stars. Even though the two otters that call the Aquarium home are nocturnal, it's a little hard to see them. After the much darker section, the calmer section of the Piedmont and swamps are next. Of course, this includes alligators, kestrels, and a myriad of fish and invertebrates. The Piedmont gives way to the coast, where guests can look at festive art displays, and watch daily enrichment activities. Enrichment is a way the Aquarium cares for their creatures' mental health, either through play or regular change of habitat. Some featured enrichment includes snakes playing on a peg wall with a handler, or the addition of toys, new plants, and rocks to an animal's enclosure.

The ever-exciting touch tank is open during Aglow, though many of the

small creatures may not be as active as usual. Right next to the touch tank is the outdoor aviary, which has plenty of native lowcountry birds like spoonbills, herons, and pelicans. Just like the outside wharf, the aviary also has cheerful neon signs that showcase the fish and stingrays.

After spending lots of time in each section, you'll run into the Great Ocean Tank, which is the deepest tank in the United States. At 42 feet, the tank is arguably the most impressive of all the exhibits, and the most festively decorated. You might even see divers dressed as Santa, waving at guests and spreading holiday cheer.

All in all, Aquarium Aglow is an event showcasing everything that the South Carolina Aquarium has to offer, well as providing a fun and festive way to celebrate the winter season.



Algow Jellyfish

Charleston Daily

## Students Compete In Schoolwide Poetry Out Loud Competition

by Luciano Cusatis

On January 4th, two days after school resumed from break, the library was packed with students, parents, and faculty, watching students recite two difficult poems of their choosing from memory for SOA's annual Poetry Out Loud competition. This year, nineteen SOA students of all grades and majors recited their poems for the final time, after practicing them throughout the holiday break. “Poems are meant to be heard,” Dr. Cusatis, who spearheaded the event, told *Applause*, “Memorizing is only the first step, internalizing and performing it is the real challenge.” The participating students worked very hard to understand their poems and the specific ways to deliver them. The contest was sponsored by *Applause* and hosted by Ms. Gomez in the Bonds-Wilson Campus Library. Mr. Martin served as emcee, informing and entertaining the audience who spoke between the student's recitations.



Poetry Out Loud Competitors

Mr. Martin

The participating students were **Annika Baran, Bryce Beasley, Ava Borelli, Luna Delgado, Liv Dewhirst, Linda Garzeria, Nora Green, Julia Hartman, Victoria Hickerson, Jessie Johnson, Maggie Largent, Daisy Martin, Marley Mendes, Kayden Plair, Janette Salazar Velasquez, Evan Sandifer, Val Simancas, Kibru Stanfield, and Dakota Townsend**, all students of Dr. Cusatis, Mr. Martin, or Mr. Morelli.

The contest was judged by three Academic Magnet English teachers: Mary Katherine Langford, Jennifer Grayson, and Monique Collins, who graduated from SOA as a creative writing major.

Junior Theatre Major Liv Dewhirst came in third, winning a twenty-five dollar gift card. She recited “Requiem” by Camille T. Dungy and “Listening in Deep Space” by Diane Thiel. In second place was Sophomore Theatre Major Dakota Townsend, who read “Hanging Fire” by Audre Lorde and “Breaking News” by Noor Hindi, and won a fifty-dollar gift card. Senior Creative Writer Jessie Johnson won first place, and received a one hundred dollar gift card, reading “Old Men Playing Basketball” by B.H. Fairchild and “I Remember, I Remember” by Thomas Hood. Additionally, all students received a Starbucks gift card for participating.

Jessie will move on to the State competition on March 4th in Columbia, where she was named runner-up last year. Great job to all the students who participated in Poetry Out Loud!

## A Night of Honoring Mac Miller

by Elle Baker

While we consistently celebrate our classic artists who have passed at old age of natural causes, sometimes the modern artists whose lives get cut short go unappreciated in regards to revivals and tributes after their death. Especially in the hip-hop and rap genres,



cover and replicate another artist's extremely unique trademark voices and sounds. Such is the case with Mac Miller, a talented rising rapper until his death in 2018 at the age of 26. Charleston's 2023 DJ of the Year Immanuel Smalls, whose stage name is DJ Fre4k, accepted this challenge heartily. Hosted by The Tribe Hospitality at the Music Farm on December 17, the concert was intended to honor the life and music of Mac Miller.

I was unsure of what the crowd would look like going into this concert. Rap is typically more popular with the younger generation, but there were many middle-aged people there. My friend and I had a hilarious and wholesome conversation with a man who was standing next to us, who was maybe forty five years old, about how he had just gotten into the music and how he was the best rapper around, and what a shame it was that he was no longer with us. The overwhelming majority were college kids, but several high schoolers and older guests mingled about as well.

The DJ managed to do Mac Miller justice alarmingly well. Despite his life being cut so short, Miller made music for over ten years and explored many different styles and even ventured into different genres, flowing between hip-hop, rap, and even soul in the last few years of his career. DJ Fre4k included songs from all throughout Miller's career, from "The Spins," to "The Question," to "Circles," lovers of any Mac Miller era were left satisfied.



Elle Baker

**Immanuel Smalls  
onstage at the Music  
Farm**

## Holiday Spectacular: Behind The Scenes

by Elle Baker

SOA's annual Christmas Spectacular is a moving and oftentimes seamless production... on the outside. But the audience doesn't see the months of work that SOA's strings and vocal major students and teachers and volunteers put into the performance. From solo auditions to rehearsals to setting the stage, everyone involved spends hours perfecting the concert by the time we see it.

Junior Alex Lim, symphony co-concertmaster, described the rehearsals as long and tiring but efficient considering how much they were expected to rehearse. He found that learning to collaborate with the other majors was a fun new experience and went smoothly. The anxiety leading up to the performance was intense but a rewarding and proud moment once he was relaxed on stage.

Junior Vocal major Ella Duffy, who looks forward to performing at the Gilliard annually, admires Dr. Shelby's ability to conduct both the choir and the orchestra simultaneously, finding that the strong leadership present in the teachers overrides the occasional obstacle in the performances, like when the lighting cues were a little off for the first two shows. Mr. Rogers makes exaggerated, humorous faces at the choir to keep them on their toes and looking enthusiastic. An experienced performer, Ella doesn't find the time preceding the concert to be intimidating but admits that she looks forward to the end as Christmas break ensues. Her favorite part of the concert this year was singing "Angels We Have Heard on High" while the bells chimed tenderly throughout the audience.

Senior percussionist Skyler Waddell played timpani for most of the songs and loves the big audiences, finding that performing with a large ensemble takes pressure off an individual despite the chaos of trying to fit two already big ensembles into one space. Collaboration and cooperation between the majors helped keep things calm and productive as students passed time by making up games and throwing around water bottles.

SOA's Christmas Spectacular is one of the biggest and most celebrated performances of the year, with Strings, Vocal, and Band students working together to put the concert together. They closed the performance with "Silent Night" in the silent and dark theater, with three Deaf and Hard of Hearing students signing the words, followed by a hopeful "O Holy Night". It was a beautiful and tender moment to end a touching concert.



**Junior violinists,  
Trow Weeks and  
Alex Lim**



**Vocal majors Lauren Bas, Emma  
Ladd, Ella Duffy, Kelsey Hargett,  
and Evie Turner before their  
performance**

## CHAMBER MUSIC CHARLESTON



2/14/24 - SOUTH CAROLINA SOCIETY HALL

Guest violinist Amy Oshiro of the Philadelphia Orchestra joins musicians of CMC for string quartets of Beethoven and Debussy.

3/10/24 - SOTTILE THEATRE

Pianist Andrew Armstrong brings his good friends Amy Schwartz Moretti (violin), Matt Lipman (viola), Raphael Bell (cello), Alexander Fiterstein (clarinet) and R.J. Kelly (horn) to Sottile Theatre for a spectacular program of music including Rachmaninov's Piano Trio No. 1 Dohnányi's Sextet in C Major

3/24/24 - DOCK STREET THEATRE

Pianist Andrew Armstrong and violinist Gabriela Diaz joins the winds of CMC for a program of music including Mozart's Quintet for Piano and Winds and Bartok's Contrasts.

**STUDENT AND PARENT TICKETS: \$5**  
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## Junior Theater Major Directs Youth Production of *Seussical*

by Isis Hanna

Anyone who is passionate about theater knows that it isn't just the actors that make a production successful. There are so many behind-the-scenes components to any show, and the person at the forefront of all that is the director. Our very own Gavin Lahmon, an 11th grade Theater major, has found a passion for directing and is already taking initiative in starting a career. In mid-December, Gavin was invited to direct MTC's junior production of *Seussical: The Musical*, the second show he's helped direct for the theater company. Applause's Ruby Varallo attended the show and had nothing but wonderful things to say about it.

Gavin's passion for theater began when he was young. In elementary school he was a part of several youth productions, and this has led him to grow up with a belief that exposing kids to the arts early on is very important. "I'm a strong believer in getting young kids informed and active in the arts from a young age, so I find a lot of joy in exposing these kids to such a great experience early on," he told me. When the opportunity presented itself to follow in the footsteps of the directors who mentored him as a child, he jumped at it. After specializing in theater for so long, Gavin has found that he has a particular passion for direction over acting, because "it's [more gratifying] to be able to see your vision come to life and have people enjoy it." He plans to pursue a career in film direction, which comes as no surprise due to his very apparent passion for the art of film (check out Gavin and Ruby Go To A Movie if you don't know what I'm talking about).

All productions come with their challenges, and to Gavin the biggest one was working on a time crunch. Thankfully, he had some friends helping out who he mentioned by name, Ellie Schrupp and former COFC student Max Mast, along with MTC instructors. Theater is truly about community, and Gavin's understanding of that would lead one to believe that he will make a great director in his future. He even did his best to pass on that feeling of community to his pupils. "I try to show off dance numbers and songs to the kids who aren't in them to create a tight community, and boost the kids confidence in the work they've put in." He said that the biggest highlight of the show was watching the kids get the hang of their numbers and become more confident and passionate about their performances. Gavin has been invited back once again to direct MTC's production of *Annie Jr*, so if anyone would like to see the master at work, be sure to go see Gavin Lahmon and his talented young actors in the coming months.



The cast of *Seussical*

Ruby Varallo



*Seussical* actors

Ruby Varallo

## Where Are They Now: Sam Feingold

Since graduating SOA in 2021, former Band major, **Sam Feingold** has enrolled in Centre College and pursued his passion for competitive swimming. Curious about how his time at SOA affected his college life, Applause staff writer **Ashley Peterson** sat down with him and asked a few questions.

**Ashley Peterson:** How has your experience been at Centre College and what have you enjoyed most?

**Sam Feingold:** I have LOVED my time so far at Centre and am so grateful for all of the experiences it has given me. Centre is a place where you can really do everything: from Managerial Finance to Glass Blowing, Swimming and Diving to running 10k on Track, being an RA to Studying abroad in France. Centre truly embraces what it means to be a Liberal Arts College and allows students to do anything they put their mind to.



Sam Feingold

Provided

**AP:** How did your experience at SOA prepare you as a student in college?

**SF:** SOA did a great job of forcing me to learn time management skills. Between Mock Trial, Band, School, and Swimming, my schedule was packed, and I had to learn how to schedule out my tasks. This gave me a huge advantage going into college, where many students have not had those experiences. Additionally, the AP and Honors courses I took did a great job of giving me an introduction to many of the courses I have taken.

**AP:** I see that you are both a swimmer and diver, what has your career been like as an athlete?

**SF:** The team is my favorite thing about Centre. We really are one big family, and it is one of the most supportive environments I've been a part of. They are the people I see first every day (frequently cheering me up early in the morning before jumping into a cold pool) and last every night (team dinners are THE BEST!) I cannot imagine a college experience without such good friends.

**AP:** Do you plan on continuing your swim career after college?

**SF:** Yes! I started swimming when I was 5 years old, and it has been built into my daily routine since then. I cannot imagine a life without the sport I love and I am grateful to partake in a life-long sport.

**AP:** What are your goals for the future?

**SF:** In the future, I plan to work in the residential summer camp world. The past few summers I have had the opportunity to work at Falling Creek Camp, an all-boys summer camp in North Carolina. It has been the most fun and rewarding work I have ever done, and I hope to continue giving back to the community that has given me so much as a camper and a counselor!

**AP:** Do you do any activities that involve your major at SOA?

**SF:** At Centre, I've had the opportunity to participate in a variety of arts. As a freshman, I continued playing French Horn in our Orchestra but unfortunately had to stop due to schedule conflicts. That said, I was encouraged to continue taking art classes at Centre, both by our amazing faculty and my love of art that SOA instilled in me, and found myself taking both guitar lessons and a Hot Glass class. I have continued both, and just had the opportunity to collaborate in making a glass piece that was put into the International Glass Museum alongside the work of Stephen Powell.

**AP:** What advice do you have for seniors about going to college or who want to continue their athletic career?

**SF:** I would encourage all athletes to consider continuing their sport in college. Athletics are a great way to make your college application more robust and to get more money! They also provide you with a built-in support group once you arrive, making the transition so much easier. I would encourage athletes to reach out to coaches and schedule overnight visits, and I would not hesitate to ask for an early read on your application if you think you've found the right school. Also, definitely give Centre a look! ROLL KERNS!



Provided

Sam during a swim meet



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## 2023's Best Hits

by Lucy Cromwell

With 2024 now upon us, I took the opportunity to sit down and look back at 2023's discography. 2023 had many memorable hits, and plenty of top contenders across all genres and countries. With much deliberation and consultation, here are the top albums from last year, in no particular order.

***PetroDragonic Apocalypse; or, Dawn of Eternal Night: An Annihilation of Planet Earth and the Beginning of Merciless Damnation***- King Gizzard and The Lizard Wizard

This album really is a reminder that nothing is ever that serious. Sometimes you just have to take a stroll around Polygondwanaland and listen to thrash metal about the destruction of humanity and the takeover of reptilians. *PetroDragonic Apocalypse* is different from Australian sextet King Gizzard's usual psychedelic rock, but not totally out of their metier. Tracks such as "Motor Spirit" to "Gila Monster" echo their past, heavier album *Infest the Rats Nest*. King Gizzard have a reputation of delivering several albums a year, but the rowdy and slightly amusing *PetroDragonic Apocalypse* takes the top spot on 2023's Gizz releases.

***Magic Lantern***- Yorushika

Some might not care for music in other languages, but I highly encourage listening to any album by Japanese duo Yorushika, especially their newest *Magic Lantern*. Instrumentals composed by Vocaloid producer Magnate N-buna are joined by vocalist, Suis, who has the most angelic voice imaginable, especially on sweet-sounding tracks like "Algernon." Sometimes dramatic and ballad centric, *Magic Lantern* is well rounded, also having soaring, uplifting, faster paced songs like "Matasaburo." However, I don't believe Yorushika were aiming for something new sounding. In the best way possible, it is typical Yorushika. *Magic Lantern* has a certain quaint beauty and happiness to it I've only ever heard on Japanese releases.

***Sit Down For Dinner***- Blonde Redhead

Since the early 90s, Blonde Redhead has been fusing shoegaze, indie, and avant-garde, effortlessly. Their most recent record *Sit Down For Dinner* is a testament to their 30 years as a band, and how companionship and grief go hand in hand. As a whole, it is mystique and dreamy, nearly entirely composed and recorded during the height of the pandemic. The tension of the pandemic is reflected in the lyrics of "Sit Down For Dinner, Pt. 1." Some tracks are more minimalistic, some more jazzy, but all of them focus on lamentation, especially in the single "Melody Experiment," where the duality of a lovers quarrel is dissected.

***Jenny From Thebes***- The Mountain Goats

The Mountain Goats are technically just one guy, John Darnielle and a guitar. Darnielle has written about just about everything, from struggles with addiction and childhood abuse to mythical rock operas. *Jenny From Thebes* is no exception, a rock opera that is a continuation of 2002's *All Hail West Texas*. This record, a chronicle of a woman's independent life, her motorcycle, and shield tattoo, has all the monikers of a typical Mountain Goats album. Tender strings mix with perfect, private reflections of the slightly atypical everyday, creating quirky settings and events. Darnielle is the master of either weightful or light storytelling, especially in my favorite track, "Murder at the 18th St. Garage."

***The Record***- Boygenius

Indie trio Boygenius, composed of Phoebe Bridgers, Julian Baker, and Lucy Dacus broke several chart records in 2023, as well as garnering seven Grammy nominations. On their 2023 release, *The Record*, the climatic and stunningly gorgeous melding of Bridgers, Bakers, and Dacus' voices tie together themes of friendship, with twinges of regret. "Not Strong Enough" has been rattling around my head all year, and the lyric "always an angel never a god" makes me reminisce about my years of listening to the harmonies in "Bite The Hand" from their self-titled EP. Boygenius truly perfected the indie formula on *The Record*, creating accessible and familiar sounding tracks.

***The Land is Inhospitable and So Are We***- Mitski

I love Mitski. My top artist of 2023, she never misses, truly a flawless discography. ("Fireworks" is her best song, hands down.) I've previously reviewed *The Land is Inhospitable and So Are We* in the October edition of Applause, and with 2024 now upon us, I believe that it is the best album of 2023! On this Americana and western inspired album, Mitski tackles the theme of loneliness, as well as attempting to shed her "sad girl" image she's kept up for the last decade, reclaiming her public persona. Tasteful

acoustics blend gorgeously with synths, her hymn-like voice floats over melodies in songs like "Star" and "I'm Your Man." *The Land is Inhospitable and So Are We*, admittedly, also spawned their Tiktok famous song "My Love Mine All Mine."

***Starcatcher***- Greta Van Fleet

Released during the sizzling point of July, *Starcatcher* is another gem added to Greta Van Fleet's track record. I've always recommended Greta as the band to listen to when you like classic rock, but are sick of listening to the same old songs. Songs off of *Starcatcher*, such as "The Indigo Streak," remind me of "American Woman" by The Guess Who and strangely, "Juke Box Hero" by Foreigner. The energetic band once again show off singer Josh Kiszka's flamboyant vocal range, reminiscent of Led Zeppelin and Queen. *Starcatcher* is a wonderful record, because depending on what you're listening for, it sounds almost like unreleased Zeppelin, or a more independent, modern take on some of the greatest music ever released.

***Married in Mount Airy***- Nicole Dollanganger

Maybe *Married in Mount Airy* is a little too esoteric and atmospheric for most, but it's found such a perfect niche for personating vintage, dark themes. Dollanger's voice is almost how I imagine a siren from a melancholic fantasy-land would sound. She has a talent for painting a vivid spectacle of the decay of antique and gothic Appalachia. MIMA has everything you could want, addiction and religious fanaticism layered within "Dogwood" then coupled with a gloomy retelling of a couple's faded American dream through "Gold Satin Dreamer." Just like her previous albums, such as *Natural Born Losers*, the aesthetics are so unbearably good. On this record, Dollanganger taps into something so horribly and rightfully lost to time.

## SOA Students "Paint the Town Red and Gold" at The Pour House

by Isabella Pineda

On December 16th and 17th, SOA students, **Abby Harris, Sam Harris, Rayna Perez, and Skyler Waddell** performed alongside the *Marshgrass Mamas* for their "Yuletide Special" at the Pour House. In between the *Marshgrass Mamas* sets, they were invited onstage as the "Marshgrass Minis" to play tunes ranging from a festive "Please Come Home For Christmas" sung by Sam to a Cary Ann (member of the *Marshgrass Mamas*) dedicated "Birmingham". Applause staff writer Isabella Pineda sat down with the SOA-hailing performers to ask them a bit about their experience playing the gig.

**Isabella Pineda: I know you performed during SOA's food festival this year with other SOA students. Is this your first gig outside of SOA? How many bands have you played with so far?**

**Rayna Perez:** I've played on stage since I was little and was just starting out on fiddling. My mom has been fiddling long before me so I just kinda got pushed into it and never stopped. I've dabbled in a couple of bands, but my friends and I just kinda throw stuff together and try to have fun!

**IP: Were you nervous? If so, did you have a routine that you did to make yourself feel more comfortable?**

**RP:** I was a little nervous, but as soon as I played that first note it was almost like a relief.

**IP: What was your favorite song to play?**

**RP:** When I was little, my first fiddle tune that really set me up was the Orange Blossom Special by Johnny Cash. I just played an intense version of it.

**IP: What were rehearsals like for you? Did you find the preparation for the gig to be difficult?**

**RP:** I hate to admit it, but I do slack a little. However, I have a pretty good ear that definitely makes it a lot easier to work things out quicker. Practicing is always fun with friends.

**IP: Overall, how was your experience at the Pour House? Did you enjoy performing and do you see yourself doing something similar in the future?**

**RP:** I love the Pour House and have been going there since I was not even a year old. My mom used to play on that stage while she was pregnant with me. I always look forward to playing there year after year!



Provided

Rayna and Skyler onstage



**Isabella Pineda: I understand you were a part of The Lunch Brothers last year. Has your experience with your band changed since some of your band members graduated? Have you changed anything about your band, such as the style of music?**

**Skylar Waddell:** Yeah, the band pretty much dispersed when some of the guys went to college. We haven't played as the Lunch Brothers in about a year. I started a trio called the Stono River Project with Justin Gilliard and Bryce Waldron-Norén, the bassist and drummer from Lunch Brothers, and that's the group I've been gigging with. We play my original music along with some covers in the acoustic folk/bluegrass style. We're getting in the studio in January to record an album, so look out for that.

**IP: How did this gig compare to others you've had in the past?**

**SW:** The Pour House is my favorite venue in town- both to watch shows and to play. It's such a comfortable and relaxed environment, and the people are great. This gig was unique because I was playing with friends whom I'd never played with before, and we didn't get a chance to practice together until the day of. Despite the fact that we threw it together last minute, it was super low stress and just a lot of fun.

**IP: What was your favorite song to play?**

**SW:** Delta Dawn was a fun one. I had never played the song before, and that's the one we all played on- Rayna, Abby, Sam, and I. I think we really locked in together on the second night when we played the inside stage.

**IP: What do you love most about performing?**

**SW:** It's hard to say what the best part is, but it's all the variables of playing live that make each gig exciting. The audience, the other players, the setup, the sound of the venue- there are so many unknown factors to keep you on your toes. That's the stuff that I love about it.

**IP: Overall, how was your experience at the Pour House? Did you enjoy performing and do you see yourself doing something similar in the future?**

**SW:** I had a great time. The Marshgrass Mamas really know how to throw a fun Christmas show. I would love to do something like that again.

**Isabella Pineda: I understand that your family owns the Pour House. Do you get the chance to perform a lot there? And do you think your family's involvement in the arts has shaped who you are as an artist?**

**Abby Harris:** I basically get equal opportunity as anyone else. I typically only play there for the Marshgrass Mamas Christmas Show because Cary Ann Hearst of the band knows me well and invites me to play with them. But other than that, I don't typically play there. My family's involvement with the arts has definitely been a huge part of my life. From an early age, I was exposed to so many bands and different genres. It's definitely shaped who I am. I got into singing as well as acting and I have always had a passion for the arts.

**IP: How did this performance compare to others you've had before, including those you've had at school as a theater major? Do you prefer theater shows or music gigs?**

**AH:** They are definitely different. Singing onstage is more direct I suppose. You're singing directly to the audience and making that connection as yourself. Whereas in a musical, you're a character portraying the emotions of that character through

dialogue or song. I love both equally.

**IP: What was your favorite song to play?**

**AH:** It's hard to choose, but definitely Birmingham by Shovels and Rope. I've been singing that song since I was little and it was dedicated to Cary Ann for letting me play with her every year (Shovels and Rope is her band). That song holds a special place in my heart.

**IP: Do you help your family with the preparation for gigs at the Pour House?**



Abby and Rayna after their show

Provided

**What is the process your family goes through to prepare for them?**

**AH:** Yeah! Sometimes I'll help with setup. Especially for outdoor lot shows, it's really all hands on deck. At the last show, I helped set up the front and I actually was up front helping run security, making sure no one was bringing in things they shouldn't be. I've also helped with merch, decorating, etc. in the past.

**IP: Overall, how was your experience at the Pour House? Did you enjoy performing and do you see yourself doing something similar in the future?**

**AH:** It was great, I always love playing and it's such a great community. I definitely see myself pursuing performing arts. Theater, music, film or otherwise. I have a great passion for my arts.

## SOA Symphony Orchestra Stages Wonderful Holiday Spectacular at Gaillard

by Braeden LaRoche

On December 12 and 13 SOA's high school Strings, Band, and Vocal students performed their Holiday Spectacular concert at the beautiful Charleston Gaillard Center to enthralled audiences who sold out the venue both nights.

The concert included classic Christmas compositions: "Joy to the World," "The First Noel," "Angels We Have Heard on High," "O Holy Night," and the Hallelujah chorus from George Frideric Handel's Messiah oratorio alongside a nontraditional performance of "Silent Night" featuring SOA's Deaf and Hard of Hearing department. Four Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, Deonta Nelson, Katerin Figueroa, Karolyn Figueroa, and Marquis Larry, signed the lyrics, and the music slowly dwindled as the players put down their instruments and began to sign in tandem, the silent concert hall filling with the faint rustling of many limbs in hypnotic motion.



Students performing during the Spectacular

The Jewish holiday tradition was celebrated with "Mi Y'maleil" from David Ludwig's Hanukkah Cantata, a beautiful piece well executed by our skilled orchestra and singers.

Also performed were some arrangements of modern Christmas classics, such as "Mary's Little Boy Child," "Sleigh Ride," "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year," "We Need A Little Christmas," and "Rudolf, Bells, & Holly," a combination of the several popular songs alluded to in its title.

SOA's symphony orchestra and singers played one other piece, "Arise, Shine!," an excellent spiritual composition by Dan Forrest, who also arranged "The First Noel" performed here.

On both nights, the concert ended with a standing ovation for our Strings, Band, and Vocal students, who delivered a consistently exceptional and professional performance.

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Rayna and Skylar onstage



## SOA Advice Column: Ask Ashley!

After digging through the Applause archive, staff writer extraordinaire, **Ashley Peterson**, decided to revitalize the timeless classic, "SOA Advice Column." With queries coming directly from students (via @soaapplause on Instagram), Ashley was sure to thoroughly answer some of SOA's most burning academic, artistic, and general advice.

### Anonymous: What is the best way to ask someone to be your valentine?

**AP:** Don't be boring! Think of something original that resonates with that person and your relationship. Yes, you can look online for ideas but don't copy them exactly. You want to make it special for them especially if you want them to say yes. If they have a favorite movie, TV show, or music group then you could try to find a way to incorporate that into your plan. If they happen to go to SOA and really enjoy their major then you could include that. For example, if they love musical theater, then use their favorite musical. Think of their favorite candy, food, color, animal, or anything else that could help you make it one of a kind because you want them to remember it after all. Even if it's cheesy, anyone would be happy to be asked to be your valentine. And reminder: it doesn't matter if you've been together for a week or two years, you still need to ask them to be your valentine! And even if it's your crush, you can still ask them, as it's a great way to start a relationship.

**Anonymous: This person asked me out recently and I said yes because I felt bad. How do I tell them that I don't actually like them and just want to stay friends?**

**AP:** I completely understand feeling bad for rejecting them, but remember you always have the option to say no, even if it's just a small date, in case you ever find yourself being pursued by someone you don't have mutual feelings for again. But now that you have agreed to go on the date, you can still tell the person your true feelings, and believe me, you aren't the first person ever to do this to someone. Is the conversation going to be awkward? Probably. But it's only as awkward as you make it out to be. Tell them as soon as you can; preferably in person just to make it more personal, and try to do it before the day of the date. Just tell them how you really feel; don't lie saying you can't make it anymore or that you're not ready for a relationship (unless you really aren't, then that's a valid excuse). If you aren't interested in them that way or have feelings for someone else then tell them so they aren't left questioning why you canceled. Remember to be gentle with the person, as rejection is hard, but don't blame yourself for not reciprocating feelings; rejection is a part of life. It may sting them a bit at first, but there's plenty of time for many dates in the future for the both of you, even if it's with other people.

### Anonymous: All of my friends are talking about college but I'm thinking about not going. Is that a good decision?

**AP:** Honestly, both going and not going to college can be a good or bad decision. You have to think about what is right for you and the future you want to happen. College is amazing for some people, but it isn't the perfect fit for everyone and that's completely okay. Although you'd like to realize college isn't right before starting your first semester there, that isn't always the case; a lot of people realize college isn't for them once they've been there for a semester or two which is also okay. If you don't want to go far from home or to a big university, community college is always a great option if you'd like to take some classes to help find a job for you but save up for your future. I know many people who are going to Trident Tech for a few years, or even the community colleges upstate, to get some distance in between them and Charleston. Everyone's path isn't the same and college doesn't always have to be a part of that. Try to not let what other people want with their life influence your future, because that only makes it harder for yourself.

## Where Were They Then: Mr Grauer

Curious about beloved guidance counselor, **Billy Grauer's**, past, Applause staff writer **Lucy Cromwell** sat down with Mr. Grauer to ask him a few questions about his time before SOA.

### Lucy Cromwell: Where is your hometown and what are your favorite childhood memories?

**Mr. Grauer:** I was born and raised in Media, Pennsylvania about 20 minutes outside of the city of Philadelphia. The neighborhood I grew up in had a lot of kids my same age so we were always playing sports, riding our bikes places, hanging out, and getting into



Cate Traywick

**Ashley Peterson**

trouble. My house was one of the common spots for all of our friends to congregate at after school and I will always appreciate my parents for allowing my friends and I to trash their house and eat all of their food.

### LC: Where did you attend college, and what degrees did you earn?

**BG:** I attended Penn State University where I earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology with a minor in Human Development and Family Studies. I stayed at Penn State to earn my Master's degree in Education. I also recently completed my School Administration add on certification at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

### LC: What encouraged you to go into education, or when did you realize it was what you wanted to pursue?

**BG:** I always knew I wanted to help people and my original goal was to become a Child Psychologist. When I started my graduate program I had no idea it would lead me down this road to become a School Counselor. The impacts I made in the different school communities during my internships empowered me to pursue a career in education where I would have the opportunity to continue to help others.

### LC: Have you worked anywhere besides SOA?

**BG:** My first job was at Kent County High School in Maryland as a School Counselor. A little known (or told) fact is that while I was working there, I was building my brand as a DJ. After some networking, a lot of travel, and some luck, I eventually got signed to a top DJ talent agency in Philadelphia & New Jersey and left education to pursue that dream full time. I had residencies at top nightlife establishments in Philadelphia, PA; Atlantic City, NJ; Wildwood, NJ; Washington D.C, and have performed in Las Vegas, the Bay Area, and New York City. In those residencies, I was blessed to have the opportunity to perform for many different famous athletes, musicians, and celebrities all across the country. I was also featured on Pitbull's Globalization radio station on Sirius XM multiple times and was an original artist for DoubleDown Radio, a long standing DJ Mixshow highlighting top DJs in the country still featured every Friday at 11am on Pitbull's Globalization.



**Mr. Grauer, in his DJ days**

**LC: Outside of being a counselor here at SOA, what are some interests and hobbies you have?**

**BG:** I really enjoy hanging out with my fiance and our dog Sullivan. We love trying new restaurants, going to the beach, traveling, and currently we are planning our wedding in May. I also enjoy fishing, working out, music, going to sleep early, and spending time with friends.

### LC: If you could be in any arts major at SOA, what would it be?

**BG:** I played the drums growing up and one of my biggest regrets is not sticking with it. I'd most likely take my "talents" to Mr. King's band!



Provided

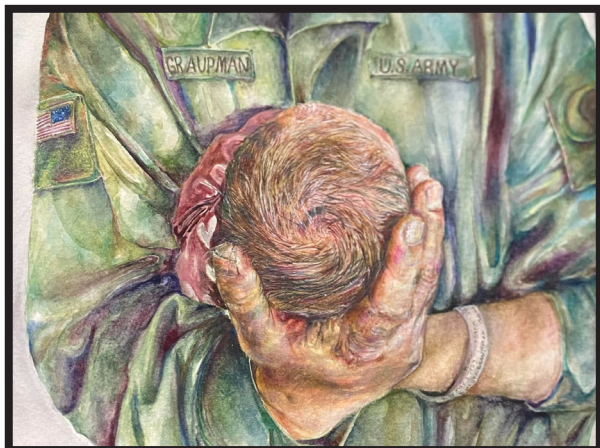
**Mr. Grauer with his fiancée**

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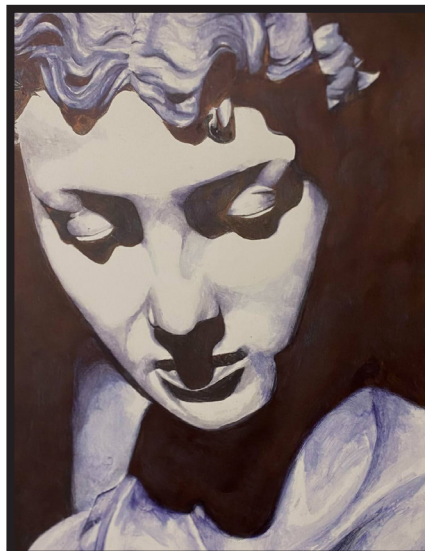
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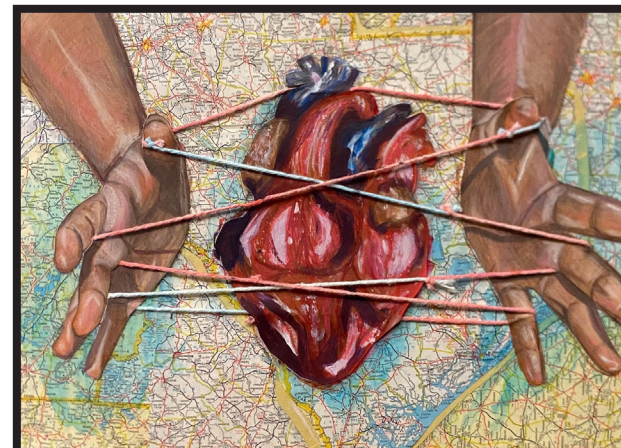




**"Delivery to Deployment"**  
by Victoria Hickerson, 11th



**"Untitled"**  
by Sophia Gauba, 9th



**"Home is in the Heart's Cradle"**  
by Ella Campbell, 10th



**"Untitled"**  
by Quinn Powell, 9th



**"The Underworld"**  
by Taylor Gibbes, 11th



**"Monochromatic Reflection"**  
by Cesar Ramirez, 10th



**"Untitled"**  
by Kay Lord, 11th



**"Untitled"**  
by Ashley Yax Apolinar, 9th



## SOA Students Flaunt Their Winter Fashion

by Isabella Pineda

If there's anything good about winter, it's bound to be the fashion. And although it's bitter, the cold gives us the perfect opportunity to layer! This winter's been chock full of new trends, and of course, SOA's outfits have not disappointed. Everyday, students walk through the halls adorned in a variety of styles and aesthetics, giving other students (me) no shortage of fashion inspiration for future outfits.

I've seen a lot of denim on denim lately, and say what you will, but I love it. **Matthew Middleton**, a junior Theater major, paired his sherpa lined denim jacket and jeans with a pair of high top nike dunks and a graphic tee. I love the way he made sure to match the color of the two denim pieces, as well as incorporate blue in every piece; it truly pulled the whole outfit together! Not to mention, the jacket's sherpa lining is the perfect way to stay warm this season!



Midi skirts have definitely been a huge trend this past year, and senior Strings major **Pai Petchsuriya** paired her skirt beautifully with a brown fur-lined jacket (another popular trend!) The skirt features ruffles, which add a nice element of texture to the outfit, and its slight shimmer is stunning. The two pieces pair together nicely and make for a bold and aesthetically-pleasing look.

Cozy knit sweaters will always be a classic winter staple. Junior Strings major **Natalie Blakeslee** paired her sweater with a pair of baggy jeans, which that I'm obsessed with, as well as black Converse and star earrings. I'm also obsessed with the way her sweater is knit. It features a looser knit, which has certainly been "in" this season. Her outfit, paired with her braids (so cute), make for the perfect comfortable and warm outfit!



I'm sure everyone is aware of the world's recent infatuation with platform Uggs, and **Rayna Perez**, a sophomore Strings major, paired hers with a light blue quarter zip with ribbed sleeves, white wide-leg pants, and a pair of gold hoops! With all the recent winter concerts, her outfit makes for the perfect rehearsal outfit that is the epitome of effortlessly comfortable and put-together.

Monochrome outfits have been popular for a while now, especially all-black outfits. Monochrome is the perfect way to make an outfit look put together, and all-black ensembles, in particular, make outfits look so sleek. **Giselle Rattelade**, a junior Vocal major, curated an outfit that consists of a cropped black wrap, a black tank top, a black mini skirt, black knee-high socks, and platform Doc Martens. The outfit is so stunning and sleek.



## What's The Best Kombucha Flavor?

Applause staff members, **Cate Traywick** and **Ruby Varallo**, coffee, Sleepytime tea, and overall fun beverage enthusiasts have long debated the best GT's Synergy kombucha flavor. Although they agree on the all-time worst flavor (Watermelon Wonder), the top spot for best Synergy kombucha flavor is still a sore subject between the two.

### Ruby's Ranking

1. Strawberry Lemonade
2. Guava Goddess
3. Trilogy

4. Lemon Berry
5. Golden Pineapple

When I had my first sip of kombucha, I was disgusted. I was in fourth grade, and not yet sophisticated enough to appreciate the delicious tang of fermented black tea. As I drank my inaugural Watermelon Wonder, I was left wondering how anyone could possibly enjoy such a beverage. Now that I am older and wiser, I have become the very person I used to question the existence of: a kombucha enthusiast. A day without kombucha is a bad day.

I've tried a wide variety of brands, but I always end up back at the very best: Synergy. Strawberry Lemonade is incredibly underrated and my all time favorite flavor. The slight bitterness of the kombucha blends perfectly with sweet notes of strawberry to create a truly incredible drinking experience. It's followed closely by Cate's favorite, Guava Goddess, which completely lives up to the name through its delicious guava taste. Trilogy, which is a blend of raspberry, lemon, and ginger, fittingly comes in at third place. Lemon Berry is Trilogy's distant cousin, with a similar flavor profile and almost equally fantastic sip. Coming in fifth place is Golden Pineapple, whose taste differs the most from the previous four, but is just as refreshing and wonderful. Leave any of your preconceived notions about kombucha behind and give it a try!



GT's

### Cate's Ranking

1. Guava Goddess
2. Trilogy
3. Gingerade
4. Golden Pineapple
5. Elderberry Juniper

I had my first tentative sip of kombucha, or "booch" as my mother so ridiculously calls it, this summer. It was Mystic Mango, and it was the most repulsive thing that I have ever tasted. Luckily, I hated it because I always have and always will hate mango flavored anything. A few short weeks later, I had a sip of Golden Pineapple, and it was life changing to say the least.

Although I haven't really branched out when it comes to different brands, I am a diehard GT's Synergy kombucha girl, and I have most definitely sampled every flavor they have to offer, but per the title of the article, there are some standouts.

Coming in at #5 is Elderberry Juniper, and despite its ranking, overall it's one of the best. The tartness of the elderberries is complimented by the vinegary taste of fermented tea and it is absolutely divine. Taking the #4 spot, and forever holding a special place in my heart, is Golden Pineapple, with its summery taste that brings back the fondest of memories. The flavor that holds spot #3 is Gingerade, which has always been my mom's favorite, but I've only recently come around. It's ridiculously refreshing and it tastes like sitting by the fireplace and watching Juno. My top two flavors are practically interchangeable, but one had to take the top spot. Coming in at #2 is Trilogy, which is an excellent blend of lemon, ginger, and raspberry, but at times I find it just a bit too tangy. Finally, at #1 is Guava Goddess, which not only has the best name in the entire line, but tastes like a sip of a tangy guava fruit from heaven. When it comes to fun drinks, aside from coffee, a cold and crisp bottle of kombucha is the way to go.



GT's

LEON  
STAVRINAKIS  
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# SOA Serves, Spikes, Scores!

Photos by Riley Borkowski, Ella Schrecker, and Cate Traywick





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## Creative Writing Student Work

Collected by Isis Hanna and Rutledge Hammes

### Excerpt from Jack Lindsay's Senior Thesis

The door opened and there was his mother, wincing in the sunlight, one hand beckoning impatiently, the other plugging her nose.

"Hey—" Noah started.

"Quickly, come in, come in, fast, fast." She slammed the door shut behind him as he entered, plunging them in darkness. She stuffed something under the door, then leaned with her back against it, chest heaving as if she had been holding her breath.

"Mom...?" Noah said unsurley. His eyes were slow to adjust to the dim, flickering light that slunk into the hall from the living room. The windows shutters were closed tightly, daylight peeking through cracks in the wood. Shoes scattered the hallway. Her slippers, clogs, sandals, all mismatched and strewn about. Some of his fathers boots sat in the corner behind the door, where he had always kept them. Rags were stuck under the doors, old shirts and sheets, jammed tightly. A bed sheet draped over the hall mirror. He turned to look at her. She remained leaning on the door, hunched, hand over her chest, breathing heavily. Her hair sat in a matted ponytail that looked like it had been made long ago. Her clothes were heavily wrinkled. Her eyes darted over him suspiciously, occasionally glancing somewhere behind him. Something awful lurked at the back of his every inhale, sick and sour and sweet. He shuddered.

"What... happened?" She sagged against the door when he said this, as if recoiling, turning her chin to the side and staring at him out of the corner of her pitted eyes. Her lip quivered.

"They're dying," she hissed. All of the sudden she took off shuffling through the house, leaving Noah to follow along behind her. The kitchen was much the same. Dishes piled in the sink. Fruit flies on overripe bananas. Pots and pans stacked high on the stove. Drawers left open. Paper covered the refrigerator, notes, illustrations he couldn't make out, some entire sheets of paper taped together, tacked by old magnets.

The living room felt tight and cramped without the light from outside and the view of the marsh. A candle sat on the table, flickering away on its last inch of life. His mother stood next to it now, face shrouded, her hunched form casting a twisted shadow across the floor onto the wall. Picture frames turned face down on the mantle. The couch looked like it was being slept in. The smell was worse here. It caught in Noah's throat, reminding him of something.

"Do you smell it?" His mother asked. "My plants. They're dying. Out there. I can't stand the smell... Did you see my Azalea? That poor thing."

Noah walked slowly into the room, toward the fireplace. The smell grew stronger.

"They want me to know but I know already, I know..."

He knew that awful smell. In his stomach was a pit that grew with every word, with every step.

He kneeled down to the fireplace, examining its doors. The woman and the horse.

"I tried to take good care of them, and I did, for a long, long time didn't I? Didn't I? What do they want me to do? I can't stand their smell. They are crying to me. I get it already, but they just go on screaming and dying and rotting.

Noah slowly reached out to the doors.

"Don't open that."

"Why?" He turned to look at her. He couldn't see her face.

"Please, don't." That god awful stench. He recoiled when he pulled open the doors, the brass scraping on the brick. The smell was overpowering.

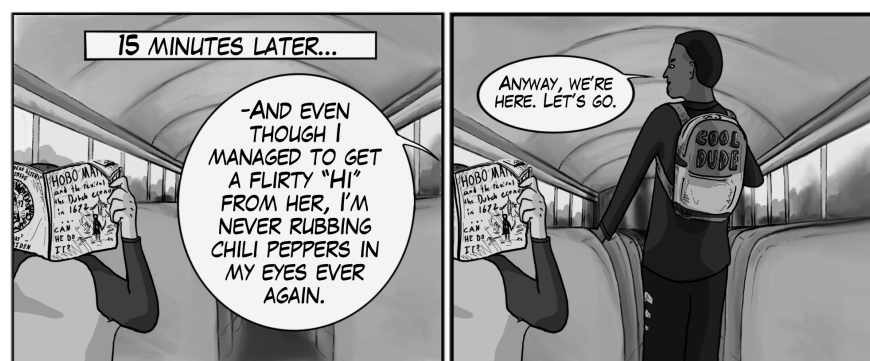
He squeezed his eyes shut as he gagged. That eyeless deer. He looked into the fireplace with watering eyes.

There, in the corner, laid a squirrel, dead, rotten, its face sunken, skin clinging to bone, teeth jutting out from rotted flesh, appendages splayed. It looked as if it had tried chewing off its broken leg. And the bugs, flies, gnats, fleas, crawling through every hole, out of mouth and into empty eye sockets, crawling through fur, moving under skin. This ugly dead thing stuck to the floor in a brown oozing heap, death's malaise leaking from its orifices and tumbling out onto the floor, into the room, throughout the house, and laying in their lungs, sick and black and not going anywhere, leaving nothing but a bad taste and a dark stain that can't be forgotten no matter how hard one may try.

### Excerpt from eighth grader Chloe Johnson's fiction piece

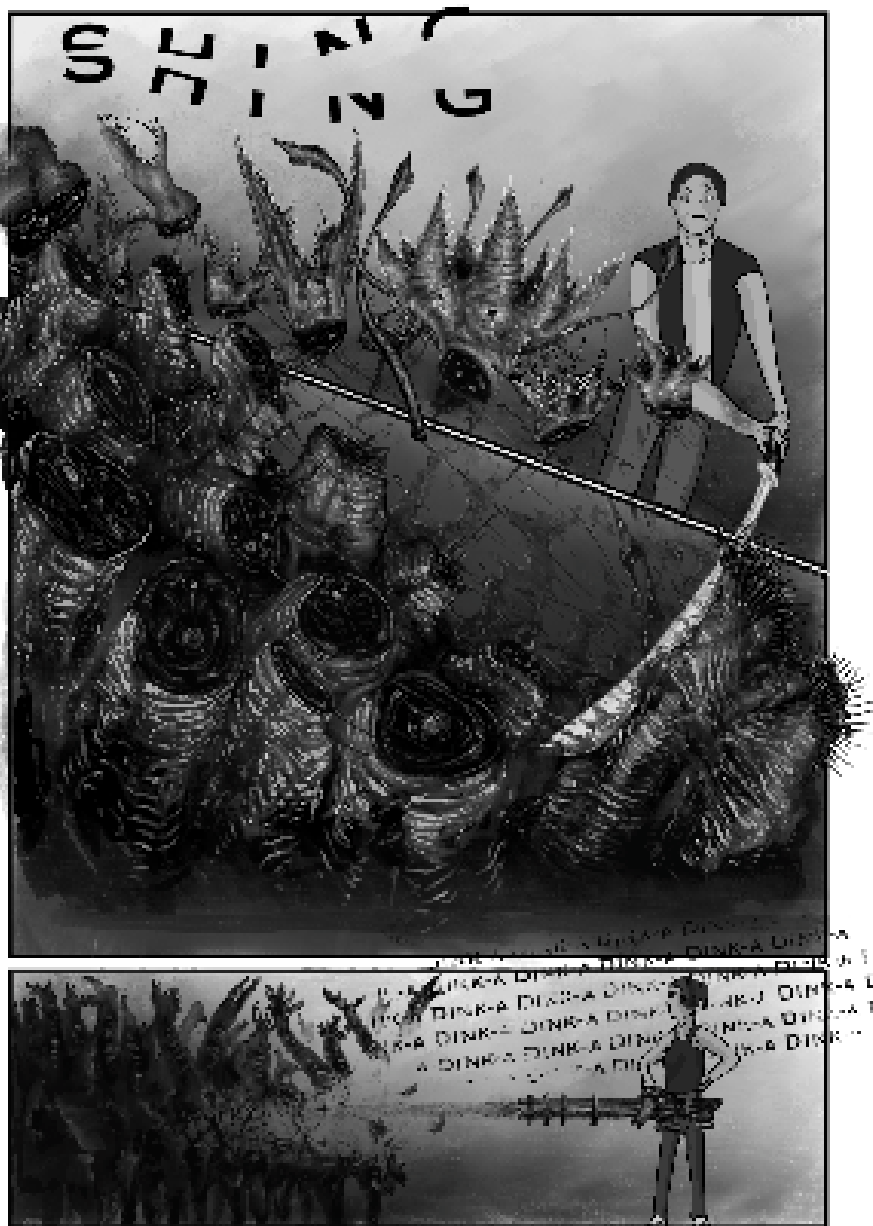
The marsh has always been a quiet-loud place. The meeting spot where the ocean greets the river who waves to the trees. Where Egret's feet step slow in the tall grass, where periwinkle snails climb great blades and cottonmouths stalk over weeds and sludge water. Then deep where marsh meets trees, you find swamp. The swamp is slower moving, like an old man who stands restfully in his haunches and holds his back in ache. The swamp is pure earth, a sacred daughter of Mother Nature herself. A sort of heaven, covered in a heavy blanket of moss and algae. Somewhere in between the deep curving paths of trees, there's a clearing, a patch of uneven mud-land. Here lies what is not to be called a house, but rather, a home. A shack-like building, leaning on sunken framework and held by rotted walls. It sagged, growing with the direction of the mush ground that swallowed it whole. The earth was eating the structure, so slow-quick that you could tell it was a delicious meal. This was the wild taking kindly to it, though. To the swamp, it was just another feather in a bird's wing.

### Excerpt from TJ Griffin's Senior Thesis, *Dreamscape* (cont. on page 18)





Excerpt from TJ Griffin's Senior Thesis, *Dreamscape* (cont. from page 17)



Excerpt from eighth grader Harper Woodlee's fiction piece

Ronny Wheeler stood on top of the orphanage's roof, his back facing the brick chimney puffing out smoke and his feet pointed towards the edge. His foot struck the ground, and beneath him tiny Charles smiled up at the water-stained ceiling from his tilted iron bed. Another step and twins Dennis and Douglas rolled to grin at each other in their beds, their missing front teeth mirroring one another. A third step and Johnny stood up on his bed, his ear pressed against the ceiling to get a better listen, his blonde hair caught in a stray nail. A fourth step and William was passed out beneath him, his face in a permanent perplexed expression and the indent of his glasses prominent on his nose. Fifth step and Ralph was picking his nose, though he paused and glanced up at the ceiling for a moment before resuming his digging. Under the sixth step, which echoed all throughout the room, Lawrence rolled over and covered his face with his pillow, letting out a small groan of annoyance.

"Flying again? God, can't he take a break?" he yelled. But despite his remark, Lawrence dared a peak out from under his pillow and watched Ronny fly over the fence. Each night he fell asleep to thoughts of what great adventure Ronny might be going on.

## Fall Food and Fun Festival!

Photos by Elle Baker and Luciano Cusatis

On Friday, November 17th, SOA Student council hosted the Fall Food and Fun Festival. This event featured games, food, and prizes and was a rousing success!



## January Spotify Playlist

by Ella Kay

It's the new year, and staff writer Ella Kay has cooked up a playlist to fulfill all of your hopes and dreams for 2024 to. From Alex G to Pinegrove, this month's playlist is one full of music to "lock in to".

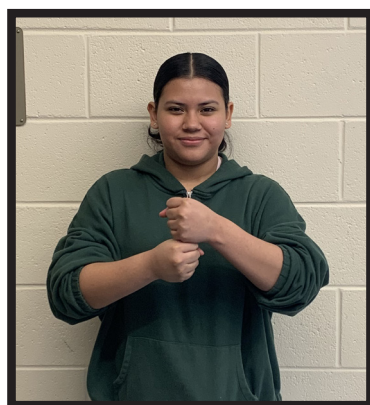
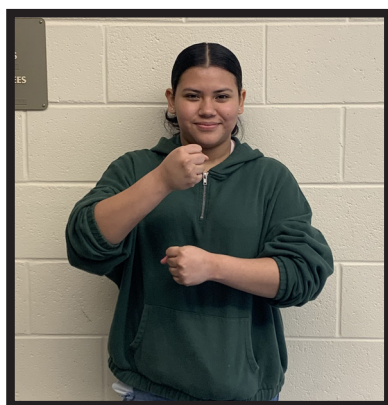




# Sign of the Month: “Happy New Year”

by Luciano Cusatis

Demonstrated by Karolyn Figueroa,  
12th grade ASL & Deaf Culture



1. Place your hands flat on your chest and slide them up
2. Slide your dominant hand up across the palm of your other hand
3. Hold your dominant fist above the other
4. Move your fist in a circle around the other hand and end with both hands touching

## January Sports Update

by Luciano Cusatis

Students are currently in the midst of their winter sports seasons, and many SOA athletes are thriving on Academic Magnet's basketball and wrestling teams. The Girls Junior Varsity basketball team has seen great success this year, as they currently boast an 8-6 record for the season. On top of this, they came in first place in the gold bracket of the St. Johns Ty Solomon JV Tournament over the holiday break, beating St. Johns High School 27-23 on December 17. Sophomore Band Major **Nadia Fox**, who received one of the MVP awards of the tournament, told *Applause*, "I'm looking forward to playing more of the teams that are a part of our region and hopefully getting a good place in the region." She also described an exciting conference game they recently played against Timberland, where they won 15-13 in overtime.

The Boys JV team has also been playing exceptionally well this season with the help of SOA athletes, **Jay Meloy**, **Gavriel Pekar**, and **Omari Wynn-Ferrel**. After losing their first two games of the season, they went on a very impressive seven-game win streak, and now hold a great 7-3 record. Additionally, they crushed Timberland in their conference game on January 5th, winning 49-10.

The Varsity Girls team has also been playing well, with Sophomore Piano Major **Josie Barrineau**. Josie told *Applause* that the tournaments they have competed in have been the highlight of the season for her, as they have been great experiences for the team, and helped them grow.

As far as wrestling goes, they have also been doing great. They won five matches at the Raptor Rumble on January 8th, scoring 27 points, and beat Bridges Prep in the championship match.

Winter seasons will be wrapping up soon, and spring sports are right around the corner, so make sure to check back in February for an end-of-season update.

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## Horoscopes

by Riley Borkowski, Luciano Cusatis, and Cate Traywick



**Aquarius (January 20 - February 18):** I know the start of a new year has you antsy to see what's to come, but this year, I want you to embrace the present. Your brilliant mind is always soaring toward the future, but don't forget the magic resides in the now. The universe has a way of surprising us when we least expect it, so let go of the reins a bit dear Aquarius, and let the present carry you to unexpected delights.

**Pisces (February 19 - March 20):** Artist's block is a tough thing to beat, but you can't let it get you down. It's a new year, and the perfect time to get started on a new project. Perhaps you should make one of those fun temperature blankets that all the crochet influencers love to do. That'll occupy you all year! If you're not into crochet, you could write a novel, or paint a portrait of your cat. Keep yourself busy to take your mind off of the bad weather.

**Aries (March 21 - April 19):** The stars seem to be aligned for you this week, dear Aries. Unsure exactly what they're aligned for, but I can guarantee you that they're aligned for something. Maybe that one person that you've been manifesting back into your life will finally make an appearance. Maybe you'll get that C on your math quiz that you've been praying for. Or maybe you'll find a heads-up penny on the ground. The possibilities are endless!

**Taurus (April 20 - May 20):** Classic indecisive Taurus. You've been crafting your "2024 Ins and Outs" list for the last month, and if you don't figure them out in the next few days, I'm afraid that there won't be a point to it anymore, so here are my suggestions. In: podcasts, long walks, french music, and watching movie end credits. Out: South Park, pining, wearing glasses you don't need, and turning off your auto caps

**Gemini (May 21 - June 20):** There are only so many clever quips I can write before it gets regrettably old Gemini, so I am going to be absolutely real with you, stop laughing off the things that hurt you. It's okay to be serious; life doesn't always have to be a punchline. Take a break from the constant mental gymnastics and embrace your feelings.

**Cancer (June 21 - July 22):** Hey, Cancer. I know you've been really busy lately getting all those Christmas presents for your loved ones, helping them keep up with their resolutions, and checking in on those who are prone to seasonal depression. Please make sure you're taking care of yourself just as much as you are others as we enter cold rainy days and crunch time for the end of the semester. You are loved and important, and you won't be any help to your friends if you're burnt out and down in the dumps.

**Leo (July 23 - August 22):** Why so down Leo? Yes, I know it's the dead of winter. Yes, I know that you look as if you haven't seen the sun in weeks. And yes, yes Leo I understand that you don't even feel human when you aren't tanned, but chin up! There are only a few months of this torturous cold weather left, and then you're back to daily sunburns and inevitable skin cancer!

**Virgo (August 23 - September 22):** As we step into this month, let's harness the incredible power of your eye for details. Dive into tasks with the utmost precision, paying extra attention to the smallest features. Trust me, success will be right on your heels. Your talent for noticing the intricacies is not just a little knack, it's your secret weapon.

**Libra (September 23 - October 22):** "New year, new you" is the exact opposite of what your mantra should be for 2024 Libra. Stop making New Year's resolutions because you have never been the problem, and resolutions are overrated. This year, you need to focus on embracing the wonderful qualities that make you who you are and stop trying to change yourself for other people, because other people are not worth your time or your tears.

**Scorpio (October 23 - November 21):** You're undeniably talented, and it's evident to everyone around you, but you have a tendency to be your harshest critic when things don't unfold perfectly. Remember, perfection is unachievable and nobody has a perfect journey. Have fun with your mistakes. Remember that they make you, well, you! Be as kind to yourself as you are to others. You deserve the same compassion you generously offer.

**Sagittarius (November 22 - December 21)** Sagittarius, with so much love, please make it a point to touch some grass this year and stop focusing on who's doing what. Sometimes you need to clear your mind from all of the madness that is high school, and what better way to do that than by hugging a tree? I know rotting in your bed is comforting, but sitting in bed for hours needs to be kicked to the curb this year.

**Capricorn (December 22 - January 19)** You have had far too much going on in your life this past year dear Capricorn, take a breather. During 2024 you should embody a little fisherman sitting in a handcrafted canoe. Cast a line or two into the pond of possibility, but anything beyond that would be simply too much, protect your peace.



## Classic Movie Review: *Thelma and Louise*

by Ruby Varallo

Recently, I read an NPR article declaring 2023 the “Year of the Girl,” citing the release of *Barbie*, Beyoncé’s Renaissance Tour, Taylor Swift’s Eras Tour, and terms like “girl dinner” and “girl math.” However, I would argue that the girls have been girling since 1991, when *Thelma and Louise* hit the cinema. Directed by Ridley Scott, *Thelma and Louise* follows Thelma (Geena Davis) and Louise (Susan Sarandon), whose weekend vacation takes a turn when Louise fatally shoots the man who assaults Thelma outside a bar. Deciding to flee to Mexico, the two both get robbed and do the robbing, ignore the requests of their overbearing husbands to return home, and, most importantly, keep going.

I love the way the movie feels almost bittersweet:

*Thelma and Louise* seem so free on their journey west, but an iconic ending shot reveals that all good things must come to an end. Both Davis and Sarandon give fantastic performances that make it impossible not to root for the two of them in everything they encounter. Their friendship never loses its authenticity: the two don’t always agree and sometimes let the stress of their situation out on each other, but the way they interact is so true to the way an actual friendship works that the power of their dynamic is what ultimately sticks with the viewer beyond the final shot. I don’t think there’s a single man who is a good person in this movie, even the young and beautiful Brad Pitt, which paints a perfect picture of the society Thelma and Louise desperately need to get away from in the first place.

Start 2024 off on the right foot by watching this movie—*Thelma and Louise* can teach you plenty about how to have the ultimate weekend vacation!



## Contemporary Movie Review: *Priscilla*

by Ashley Peterson

Directed by Sofia Coppola, *Priscilla* tells the story of how Priscilla Presley, portrayed by Cailee Spaeny, entered and left her relationship with “the most famous man on Earth.” Coppola specializes in films showing how isolating fame can be, giving us *Marie Antoinette* and *Lost in Translation*, and *Priscilla* doesn’t fall short of this theme. The movie, based off of Priscilla’s own book, *Elvis and Me*, is truly captivating, showing not necessarily the other side of Elvis, played by Jacob Elordi, but the complicated parts of him that many movies tend to ignore. It focuses on Priscilla and her accounts instead of making Elvis the “bad guy” which was one request from Priscilla Presley who still considers him to be “the love of her life.” It shows the beautiful and ugly, leaving the viewers room for opinions about their relationship. This movie isn’t dramatized, it’s real and shows how trapped someone can feel by being with a super star.

Viewers see Priscilla’s life with Elvis through a young, dreamy, and star-struck lens; who wouldn’t be

enticed by the man who has every teenage girl wrapped around his finger? Elvis was seemingly vulnerable around her, making her feel special, and that’s what first reeled



her in, eventually demanding her parents to let her stay in Graceland with him. Their relationship was on Elvis’s terms from the beginning; she was there when he wanted and would always need to be ready for his call. She spent her days waiting for him to come back home, reading the latest news articles about him and his current female co-stars having a relationship which eventually caused her to obsess over becoming the perfect woman he wanted. She changed her hair, make up, and clothes all to his liking but she constantly felt like she wasn’t enough for him. One scene that stuck out to me that made her feel this way was when he complimented a fan’s perfume but had never complimented Priscilla’s even though she wore the same one. I think that one small detail really showed a dynamic in their relationship that would continue to its end. We watch through this rather slow moving movie, Priscilla turns into her own person rather than a “possession” of Elvis. She finally tells him she wants a divorce when he calls her to his hotel room one last time and we watch her drive away from Graceland into the world, finally able to make her own decisions.

The way the movie was written and filmed truly made it all about Priscilla and I found myself focusing more so on how she was feeling because of Elvis rather than Elvis himself. The movie doesn’t outwardly make its viewers feel this way but the title alone not including “Presley,” which would immediately make people think of the rock-n-roll singer, is one aspect of why Elvis wasn’t the main factor of this movie for watchers. Aside from the title, none of Elvis’s music is included in the film and while this was said to be because the branding company that owns his music didn’t give Coppola the rights to use it, I think it added another element to the movie. The soundtrack was amazing and fit the scenes well so I don’t think any music of Elvis’s was needed because this movie isn’t about him, contrasting with the movie *Elvis*, directed by Baz Luhrmann, where his music was quite important. Jacob Elordi also doesn’t look exactly like Elvis, aside from hair and voice, he honestly doesn’t resemble him at all and to me, that was very clever of Coppola to include. This movie wasn’t about Elvis and they didn’t need to find the “perfect” Elvis look alike in order to get the point across. He fit the part in other ways and his acting choices showed deeper and problematic parts of Elvis that the films praising him leave out; this is a different Elvis than we’ve seen. I also think the casting choice for Priscilla was perfect because Spaeny can somehow play an innocent fourteen year old and an approaching thirty year old amazingly and I loved that they casted someone who hadn’t been in many films as well; I truly saw her as Priscilla and not another role she was before.

I think this movie was a beautiful representation of Priscilla’s relationship with Elvis and how she grew throughout it. I truly saw the detail and passion that went into this film in order to get Priscilla’s story accurate. Priscilla Presley even praised this movie during a Q&A event and I don’t blame her; this movie is definitely in my top ten now. I am excited to see more work from both Sofia Coppola and Cailee Spaeny in the future as I don’t

think this movie would be as amazing as it was without them.

## Contemporary Movie Review: *Twilight Breaking Dawn Pt. 1*

by Emma Shelton

There are no words that can express my love for the Twilight saga, but if I had to try, I would say it is a horrific admiration. I watched them all for the first time at an extremely impressionable age and was captured by the gloomy aesthetics, melancholic plotlines, and glistening vampires. There was nothing I wanted more than to see Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart) marry Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson), and *Twilight: Breaking Dawn Part 1* brought that dream to life.

The film starts with a wedding, but not just any wedding—the most beautiful dream of a wedding ever to exist. With cascades of white flowers coming from every angle to create an almost ethereal setting, I wouldn’t be surprised if there were photos of this on hundreds of teenage girls “dream wedding” Pinterest boards.

It seems as if all of the beauty was pumped into the first few scenes because sooner than later, Bella discovers she is pregnant. This opened an opportunity for the filmmakers, more specifically the author of the novels, Stephanie Meyer, to present her political views as a form of harmless entertainment. A large proportion of the movie is spent watching the characters debate whether or not Bella should keep the baby, and while *Twilight* is mostly a joke, its interesting to see how certain parts of it hold up compared to today’s culture.

*Twilight: Breaking Dawn Part 1* is considered a fan favourite in the saga because it gives the viewers what they have been wanting for such a long time. The movie starts with the wedding that we have been waiting for since *Twilight: New Moon* and ends with an event that we have been waiting for since the beginning of the series.



## Classic Album Review: *Mothership Connection*

by Ashley Peterson

Even when considering the crazy, intense mythol of Afrofuturistic funk band Parliament-Funkadelic, their album *Mothership Connection* plays like a parody of P-Funk’s usual style. While the album still retains the classic funk feel from the 70s produced by the likes of James Brown and EWF, eclectic bandleader George Clinton takes the genre to new heights, in a more literal sense than what meets the ear.

What Clinton accomplished in producing this album was raising African-American culture to higher heights than what it had ever seen before: Space. The



of “futuristic” music. This blend creates a bizarre yet funky clash of brass and synthesizer that they perfected in this album. Alongside playing into the album’s concept and story, the idea of taking the music into space also meant that, metaphorically, there was virtually no bound, no limit as to where the art could be taken to. This idea is characteristic of the entire sound, and gives it a very bizarre twist that funk music at the time had never seen. While it is a strange listening experience, by the end of the first song, the funk will have consumed you.

The opening track “P. Funk (Wants to Get Funked Up)” begins with the message “Good evening. Do not attempt to adjust your radio, there is nothing wrong.” Immediately, you the listener are thrown into the world of Parliament-Funkadelic and its intense mythos. Throughout the entire album, there is a certain feeling of unfamiliarity as new characters and sounds get introduced to you. Overall, this helps to accomplish the “funky alien takeover” that the project aims to convey. The rest of the opening is followed by a heavy hitting brass section and unconventional synths, sprinkled in almost spontaneously and/or at will of the “Lollipop Man,” fictional radio host of WEFUNK. Referring back to the unconventional synths, keyboardist Bernie Worrell manages to soothe the randomly dispersed sax solos with the newly created MOOG synthesizer.

The following track, “Mothership Connection (Star Child),” drives home a point of the album that could make or break one’s listening experience. A large portion of the album acts more as a jam session between George Clinton and his band, with solos from each section thrown in throughout each song. This leaves in a lot of funky filler sections and repetitive vocal sections such as in “Supergroovalisticprosifunkstication” where the phrase “Give the people what they want when they want” is repeated constantly throughout the song with synth solos blaring throughout the song. While some may get bored or turned away from this, I feel as if it is indicative of the funk sound of the 70s, and acts more as “groove” music. This isn’t to disregard the lyrics, but it does highlight the cosmic sense of instrumentation that the album does so well.

## Contemporary Album Review: *Portals*

by Marz Watson

Melanie Martinez closed her character/alter-ego “Crybaby” and a new life hatched introducing the album *Portals* on March 31. During her K-12 tour, she’s been reading past life regression hypnotherapy books, inspiring her for the *Portals* album. The album got its name from her last home which she lived in for 6 years, she had a room called the “portal” room because it was always active on the other side of it, and she compared it to spirits making a pit stop on their journey. Portals are hallmarks of self-discovery, growth, and making grief or sorrow easier for people to deal with.



Melanie has always made personal lyrics but also fits them with a dreamy cutesy aesthetic, which I think is unique. As much as I enjoy all of her songs, my favorite has to be “BATTLE OF THE LARYNX.” I do like the instrumental and the meaning of this song; standing up for yourself. “BATTLE OF THE LARYNX” highlights themes of not being talked over by someone who just says things with a lack of thought. If you don’t know what a larynx is, it’s your voice box. “Don’t you battle with my larynx tonight” means don’t interrupt someone trying their best to remain calm and collected. The lyric from the chorus “How stupid, selfish baby” suggests that screaming and yelling at someone about conflict is very immature. I can somewhat relate to this song because I feel like there’s no need to yell or belittle someone for anyone else’s validation, doing that is very uncalled for and it’s a loser activity.

The first song on the album, “DEATH” offers a great message. According to Melanie, she was determined to have this in the album but writing it with other people was a struggle. She sat in the portal room and started to sing melodies until she heard a spirit with a completely different tone than hers repeat a melody she had sung out loud, she was slightly freaked out by it but continued and used that moment as confirmation. When she was done with the song. Shortly after, she let her best friend listen to it, her best friend had experienced multiple deaths in her family. As she was listening, tears started to roll down her eyes. She looked at Melanie and told her “That’s the one”. With approval from her best friend and the spirits, “DEATH” made the album.

“TUNNEL VISION” is a song that Melanie’s fans are thrilled is included on the album. In 2021 the song was leaked through a drop box hack. Melanie was thinking about trashing it after that but she let it stay because she “couldn’t rewrite a better song”. She even called it out during one of her concerts about fans listening to unreleased songs.

I like how the music videos for this album are connected, but if you’re just checking out the “TUNNEL VISION” video and you didn’t see “VOID”, it might be weird that you’re watching a four-eyed pink fairy falling to the ground with silence for a few seconds. With the added context of other videos, this provides a deeper meaning to the album. Overall the video was okay, I feel like it needed a bit more but I like how it’s a game and at the end, it shows a girl raging while the TV is starting to catch on fire. It’s a very nice pink TV and when I looked at it I wanted to buy it. She wanted to write this song with multiple meanings for people to relate to but in an earthly way, based on the lyrics I think it’s about not letting anyone take advantage of you or making you feel “little” and that you are more than what people see you as. It reminds me of ‘Alphabet Boy’ from the *Crybaby* album.

Melanie wanted to make a conceptual and thematic meaning but also wanted to talk about social media’s chokehold on society, so she made ‘SPIDERWEB’ about this issue. I do love how her three albums connect and she left easter eggs in her K-12 movie, I am excited to see what she puts out after the *Portals* album and



hopefully, she makes another album movie!

## Classic Book Review: *Blood Meridian*

by Lucy Cromwell

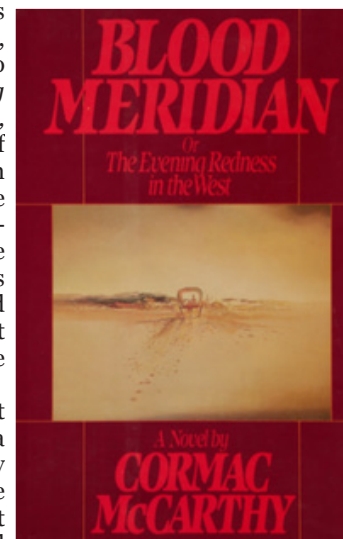
Over Thanksgiving break, I had one goal, to read the infamous *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy all while on vacation out west. A Western about the untamable forces of the unknown, the cruelty of the desert, and the despicable divine was certain to get my messed up philosophical-horror fix. The majority of the story is rooted in reality, one of the reasons it is credited as being so great is its historical accuracy, as well as McCarthy’s defiant prose.

A controversial as it is, *Blood Meridian*, also known as *The Evening Redness in the West*, is hailed as one of the “Great American Novels,” it’s set after the time of the Mexican-American War, where Native American raids were common, and the lawless land past the Mississippi were completely brutish.

The main plot is centered around a teenage runaway only known to us as “the Kid” (or in the last chapter, “the Man”) and his journey traveling around the deserts of Texas, to Mexico to California. The Kid finds himself as a recruited soldier of mercenary scalp hunters, an undertaking remnant of the war. Headed by former ranger John Joel Glanton, the nomadic hunters are fueled by their bleak desire for the bounties set up by the Mexican government in exchange for Native’s scalps.

*Blood Meridian* manages to fuse some of the most graphic horrors with chilling imagery and compelling dialogue. Staggering single sentences last entire pages; McCarthy throws away standard rules and grammar, no punctuation makes comprehension strenuous. Even with the historical accuracy, the story does not shy away from some supernatural elements, especially with the main antagonist “The Judge,” a foreboding, charismatic character. In my attempt to try and keep spoilers at bay, the Judge is a monster of a character, in size and personality. He is McCarthy’s personification of all things evil, of death, and of the devil. If he is not supernatural, then he is a stand-in for everything haunting, he is the worst part of the human condition, his philosophy darker than the scalp hunters.

My commitment to reading *Blood Meridian* while driving through the deserts of Arizona and Utah, to Death Valley and Nevada was rewarding, since the foreign scenery was identical to the story. The feeling of doom seeped into my trip, even when I had done no wrong to the land. *Blood Meridian* made me feel as if every day I spent out there was trespassing. McCarthy’s gorgeous writing of the bush was reflected back onto me, and I found myself dissecting the thin line of savagery and enlightenment the Kid walks.



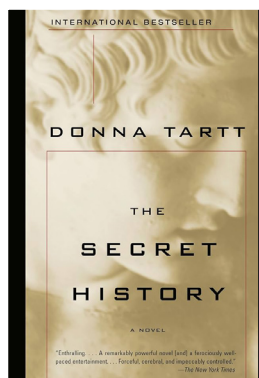


While I have never conceived of anything bleaker than the plot of *Blood Meridian*, it's praise of violence and all, something about it seems essential to read. As an American, there are parts of our history I feel other Americans are lacking in knowledge of, and there are plenty of unexplored avenues perfect for historical fiction. McCarthy tackles the darkest parts of the Mexican American war, as well as the dissolute underbelly of the frontier in a grand odyssey. It's not an easy read, but the significance and contribution to literature and historical relevance is undeniable.

## Contemporary Book Review: *The Secret History*

by Isis Hanna

"The snow in the mountains was melting and Bunny had been dead for several weeks before we came to understand the gravity of our situation." This is the opening line to Donna Tartt's debut novel, *The Secret History*. I will admit, I fell victim to the notorious side of TikTok known as "Booktok" and purchased the book on a whim after seeing that it was trending. I am quite susceptible to buying things because social media told me to. However, when I read that first line I knew I was in for a treat. Since I started highschool, I've been in a bit of a reading slump, but reading that book pulled me right out of it and into the world of Hampden College alongside Henry, Francis, Charles, Camilla, Bunny, and protagonist Richard Papen.



Hampden College, where the majority of the book is set, is based off of a real liberal arts school, Bennington College, which Tartt attended from 1982 to 1986. A lot of the mysterious goings-on at Hampden were inspired by true sinister events from her days at Bennington. The story follows Richard Papen as he meets a small class of Greek Classics students who are taught almost exclusively by one professor. Intrigued by the class's exclusivity, he worms his way into the group and gets pulled into a web of secrets that keeps you on the edge of your seat til the very last page. The setting, Vermont in the 1980s, is beautifully described in a way that really makes you feel like you're on campus with the characters, and the dark and mysterious tone is so compelling. It is a bit of a longer read, but do not let that deter you. The story will allow you to fly through the book and it won't feel so intimidating. There are no spots where the book feels like it's

dragging on with exposition; all of the descriptions are necessary and add to the plot, even if the plot isn't moving fast in that particular chapter. One of the things that makes this book so interesting is that you spend a lot of time seeing into Richard's mind, watching the world through his eyes and seeing his mental decline as the story progresses.

Although he starts out as a seemingly-normal college student, Richard slowly becomes an unreliable narrator as he gets sucked into the messed up world of the Classics class and their extreme academic commitments. He begins to conform to their ways of thinking in his quest to find out what is going on under the surface of the tight-knit group. His one-on-one conversations with individuals in the group as he grows closer to them do a lot to reveal the skewed nature of all of their minds. All in all, it's a compelling mystery with a "dark academia" vibe that draws you in from the start and will leave you awestruck for weeks after you flip the final page.

## Jazz Piano Presents Winter Concert

Photos by Ashley Peterson



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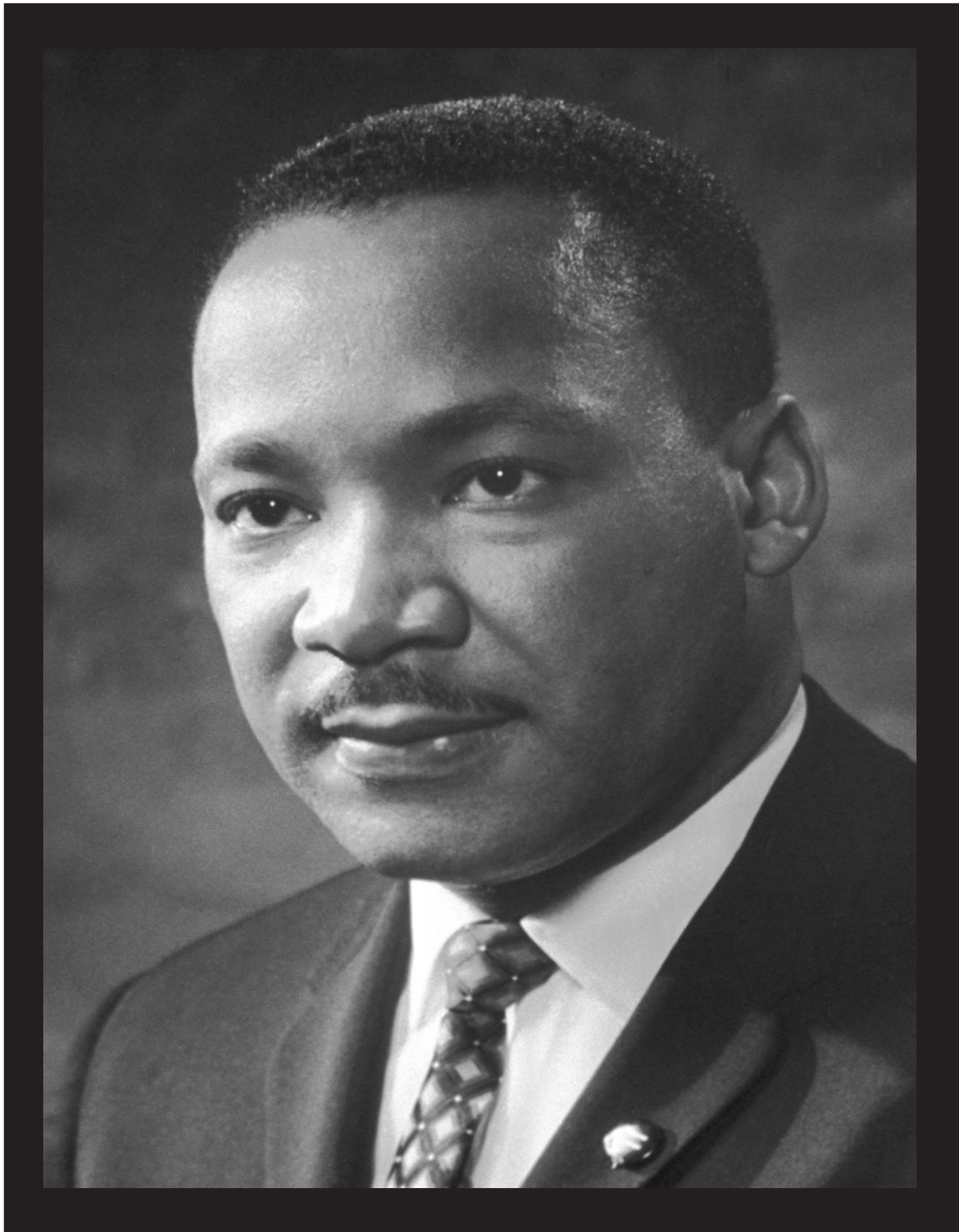
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## Jazz Trivia

by Luciano Cusatis

Manny Stavrinakis, 12th grade Strings

Lucas Fetten, 11th grade Band

1. Which singer recently broke the record for the most streamed jazz song of all time?
2. What decade is commonly known as the Jazz Age in America?
3. Which pianist wrote the song "In a Sentimental Mood?"
4. What American city is considered the "birthplace of jazz?"
5. Which popular rapper released an entirely woodwind-based jazz album in 2023?
6. Who made the song "What a Wonderful World"
7. Which female vocalist is considered the queen of jazz?
8. Which famous jazz sub-genre typically consisted of groups with around 10-25 people?
9. Which instrument was played by John Coltrane?
10. Which trumpeter made the album "Birth of the Cool?"



Luciano Cusatis

**3/10**

1. The Weeknd
2. 1920s
3. Elton John
4. New Orleans
5. Tyler The Creator
6. Louis Armstrong
7. Beyonce
8. Church
9. Double Bass
10. Michael Buble



Luciano Cusatis

**8/10**

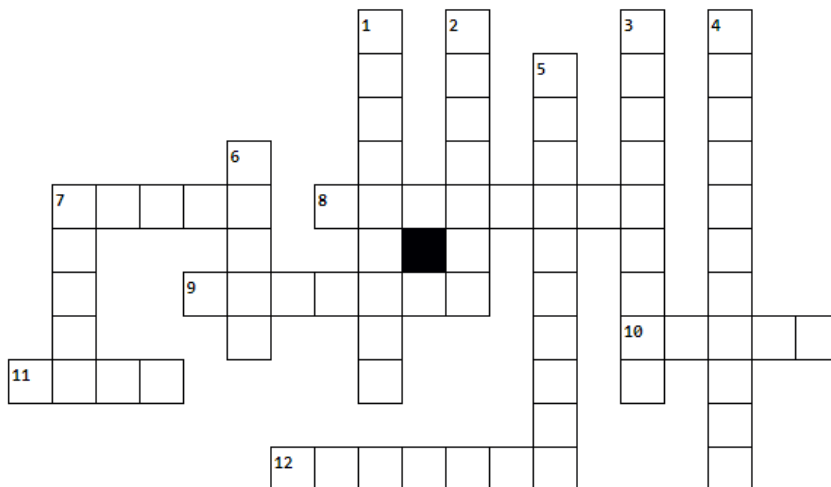
1. Frank Sinatra
2. 1920s
3. Duke Ellington
4. New Orleans
5. Tupac
6. Louis Armstrong
7. Ella Fitzgerald
8. Big Band
9. Saxophone
10. Miles Davis

## Answers

1. Lauréy 2. 1920s 3. Duke Ellington 4. New Orleans 5. André 3000
6. Louis Armstrong 7. Ella Fitzgerald 8. Big Band 9. Saxophone
10. Miles Davis

## Piano Crossword

by Lucy Cromwell



### Across

7. A music dynamic indicating loud and strong playing
8. A continually repeated musical phrase or rhythm
9. A rhythmic ending or harmonic ending to a piece
10. Rapid alternation between two notes
11. There are 88 of these
12. How loud or soft a piece is played

### Down

1. To go up or down between two notes
2. Genre of piano playing where the melody is "ragged"
3. This is a free form style of playing
4. Electronic piano
5. Relating to notes in the same pitch
6. Foot operated levers at the base of a piano
7. Where one or two themes are repeated using vocals





# Piano Word Search

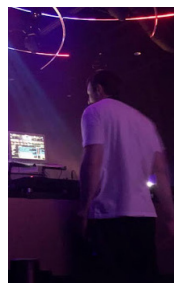
by Lucy Cromwell

- |            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| LEGGIERO   | SEMIBREVE |
| STAFF      | SONATA    |
| ALLEGRETTO | SHARP     |
| DUET       | TREBLE    |
| OPUS       | GLISSANDO |
| METRONOME  | SUBITO    |
| PIANO      | NOCTURNE  |

# SOA Sudoku

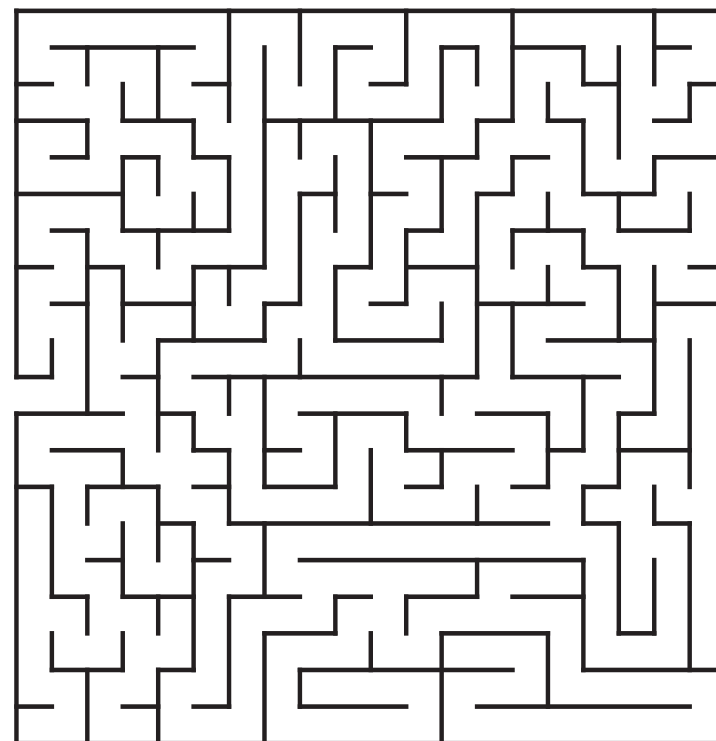
by Lucy Cromwell

1	5		3			9		
4			1		5			2
	3	7		6			5	
				2	7	4		
		6	4	8				
	8			5		7	1	
6			7		9			8
		1			2		9	5



# Help Mr. Grauer find his turntable!

by Lucy Cromwell







“I got the worst grade out of my entire class.”

Rosie Bailey, 6th Grade Visual Arts



“Playing Roblox too much.”

Sullivan Wood, 7th Grade Dance



“I haven’t made a B or above in biology all year.”

Sophia Zheng, 8th Grade Piano



“I don’t flop.”

Mr. Clark, Interventionist

# What Was Your Biggest Flop of 2023?

by Isabella Pineda, Riley Borkowski, and Emma Shelton



“I *literally* flopped on the ground and tore ligaments in my foot.”

Ms. Honeycutt, High School English Teacher



“Accidentally calling baby David ‘Bobby Fartknuckle.’”

Mr. Martin, High School English Teacher



“I cut bangs earlier in the year. Big mistake.”

Callie Williams, 9th Grade Strings



“Breaking my face at the bottom of a pool during a swim meet.”

Niko Mackie, 10th Grade Band



“I puked orange gelatinous goop on my best friend.”

Charlotte Dietrich, 11th Grade Fashion



“Catching more feelings than flights.”

Autumn “Kenzie” Lawyer, 12th Grade Theater